RACIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A CRITICAL CASE ANALYSIS OF WHITE CHILDREN RECOGNIZING, REIFYING, AND RESISTING WHITENESS

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ABSTRACT

Ronda Taylor Bullock: Racial Identity Construction: A Critical Case Analysis of White Children Recognizing, Reifying, and Resisting Whiteness
(Under the direction of Dana Thompson Dorsey)

Ideological racism is ever-present in America. Several studies of adults indicate that Whites still hold negative racial attitudes toward people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Rudd, 2014; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). However, extensive knowledge of how White children articulate their racial identity or embody racial biases is lacking. Adults went through a process of becoming White and did not wake up suddenly *as White* (Morrison, 1992; Thandeka, 1999). By three months old, Black, Brown, and White babies demonstrate a preference for people who share a similar skin color (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Gibson, Smith, Ge, & Pascalis, 2005; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). By kindergarten, however, this preference for in-group association significantly decreases in Black and Brown children but not White children (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Research seeking to better understand this population's racial identity is lacking. As such, this study took a critical approach to researching the racial identity construction of White children participating in two, one-week anti-racism summer camps.

Engaging in participant observation, I served as one of the co-facilitators of the camps. I set out to answer two main questions: 1. What does White racial identity construction look like for White children participating in an anti-racism summer camp? and 2. How do White children normalize or resist whiteness? The benefit of gaining this knowledge will help researchers, parents, and educators develop ways to combat the perpetuation of racial biases in White

children and will highlight the need for intentionality in fostering healthy racial identities in children.

Using a critical race theory (CRT) framework, aided by whiteness studies and critical discourse analysis (CDA), I centered race as the focal point for this study. Several codes and themes emerged from the data analysis, revealing that White children were recognizing, reifying, and resisting whiteness.

To my children, Zion and Zaire. I dedicate this study to you, for you are my inspiration for continuing to fight and not giving up.

Pass it down to the children.
Pass it down.
Carry it on.
Carry it on now.
Carry it on
TO FREEDOM!

Assata, An Autobiography, 2001

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRT	Critical Race Theory
WHITECRIT	White Critical Race Theory
DPI	Disruptive Peacemaking Institute

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

"*Princesses are White."* ~White boy, age 6

I was leading a school community conversation titled *Let's Talk Race* at a local charter school. Parents and school leaders were having a follow-up discussion about creating an affinity group for girls of color. Some of the White parents at the school were upset that their daughters were excluded from joining the group. During the conversation, a Latinx teacher at the school shared a personal story that illustrated the need for children of color to have spaces away from White children that affirmed their racial identity. She described a time when she noticed one of the Black girls in her class drawing a princess. The teacher was socially conscious. She expressed her desire to use that moment to affirm the young Black girl's self-esteem. She asked in a supportive tone, "Will your princess be brown?" I believe she used *brown* instead of *black* because young children often use brown to refer to Black people. Before the child could answer, a White boy in the class chimed in, "Her princess can't be Brown. Princesses are White."

I begin with this story to illustrate that children, unbeknownst to many adults, are constantly making sense of the racial world around them (Park, 2011; Aboud, 2003). I doubt that anyone explicitly told the White boy that "princesses are White." He synthesized information from multiple encounters with books, cartoons, children's costumes, and Disney movies, to name a few, and concluded that if all the princesses he had seen were White, all princesses must be White. His intentions were irrelevant. The impact of his words was that another White person had reiterated to a Black child that her existence did not matter, and that White people, particularly White girls and not Blacks, are viewed as royalty. Most people

analyzing this encounter would focus on the Black child and how the comment impacted her. On one hand, we have not learned enough about how racial micro-aggressions impact young students of color. On the other hand, what often receives little attention in encounters like the one described above is how whiteness impacts White children's identity. We need to know more about how White children construct their racial identity so that we—researchers, parents, and educators—can help them foster healthy racial identities. A closer analysis of racism and racial formation should accompany these studies because a contextualized history will help explain present realities.

In this chapter, I provide a detailed overview of the study, starting with the purpose and problem statement. I talk about the background of the problem and proceed to offer an in-depth understanding of the research study context.

Purpose of the Study

Education research with a racialized focus generally examines the educational experiences of students of color. The topics usually include analyzing their responses to racism and racial prejudice, closing the achievement gap, assigning cultural blame for poor performance, looking at grit and soft skills, or promoting culturally relevant pedagogy. This study, however, will not be analyzing people of color. I will instead critically examine the racial identities of the youngest perpetrators of racialized violence: White children. Love (2017) offers spirit murdering as way of explaining racialized violence. Citing Williams (1991), a critical race scholar who coined the term *spirit murdering*, Love (2013) defines it as "the personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries to people of color through the fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism, privilege, and power" (p. 302). She adds context by noting, "Spirit-murdering denies inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance—all things a person

needs to be human and to be educated" (Love, 2013, p. 302). The young Black girl in the opening vignette experienced a spiritual injury at the hands of a White child.

The purpose of this qualitative, single-case study is to gain a better understanding of how White children, ages 6 to 11, understand and construct their racial identity. Psychologist Janet Helms (1993) is well known for theorizing and measuring racial attitudes. Racial identity, according to Helms (1993), "refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3). The study critically analyzes the interactions, behaviors, and discourses of children participating in two five-day anti-racism summer camps. The children represent diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Disruptive Peacemaking Institute (DPI), a nonprofit organization, hosts the summer camps. This research is significant because it will help inform what we know about how White children construct their racial identities during their formative years. If we can better understand how children view themselves and others through a racial lens, we can help build anti-racist identities, lessen the formation of racial biases, and decrease harm caused by racism. This research will also inform educational policy, practice, and parenting.

Problem Statement

By three months old, babies show a preference for people who share a similar skin color (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Gibson, Smith, Ge, & Pascalis, 2005; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). By kindergarten, however, this preference for in-group association significantly decreases among Black and Brown children but not among White children (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Students act on their racial preferences in many ways. Some of those ways cause harm to other children, such as including certain children during play at recess, while excluding others. These acts of exclusion are often a form of racism, and the

multiplicative effect of being a victim of racialized violence has negative educational outcomes for people of color (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). I will achieve the purpose of this study by investigating the racial identity of White children from a critical race theory perspective and by examining their racial identity construction as discussed in white critical studies.

Background of Research Problem

Racism is embedded in the foundation of America (Bell, 1991; Harris, 1993; Lopez, 1994; Thandeka, 1999; Crenshaw, 1988). As a function of racism, wealthy Whites engineered a White identity to create divisions along race and class lines, starting with slavery (Thandeka, 1999). Racial identity is connected to one's beliefs about another racial group. Consequently, several studies indicate that Whites who have a strong racial preference for their own race also hold strong anti-blackness beliefs (Brown, Spatzier, & Tobin, 2010; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Parker, Moore, & Neimeyer, 1998). However, these studies primarily focus on adults and not on White children. Knowledge of how White youth, in particular, articulate their racial identity and beliefs about the racialized other is lacking.

Racism manifests not only through beliefs, but also through structures such as laws and policies. Racist ideologies are passed down from generation to generation through family, media, legal systems, educational systems, etc. (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Many studies on the role of race and racism in America are dated and focus on their negative impact for people of color (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). Racial discrimination's reach, for example, extends to educational environments (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Consequently, racism plays a significant role in students' experiences. However, when it comes to understanding racial identity and the impact of racism, White youth are largely absent from existing scholarship. One reason for this may be

that it is difficult for Whites in a society where they rarely view themselves as having a race (Thandeka, 1999; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Lewis, 2004) to think about themselves as White.

Current educational research that encompasses a racial construct primarily focuses on diversity, culturally relevant pedagogy, or multicultural education (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Rogers & Mosley, 2006) but rarely do these studies explicitly address racism or racial biases. Moreover, this literature almost always omits White culture as one of the cultures to study. Diversity and multicultural education usually does not involve an examination of White youth's investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 1998). An investment in whiteness, according to Lipsitz (1998) and Harris (1993), allows whiteness to function like a property, something in which to stake a claim, something that holds value and power, something that allows one the right to exclude others and gain access to spaces and places. Nieto (2003) recognizes the persistent nature of racism and believes there should be a stronger challenge to it through research and in schools. Researchers and educators play vital roles in addressing this problem.

With the current colorblind ideology, many Americans argue that they do not see race, believing that we are now living in a post-racial era (Parsons & Turner, 2014). However, studies show that we are far from there (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Rudd, 2014; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Many educational disparities regarding graduation rates, access to advanced classes, suspension rates, higher education attainment, etc., differ along racial lines (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Rudd, 2014). While many of these disparities are the result of adult influences, my study focuses on children because early efforts to disrupt racial bias formation is key to developing anti-racist adults. White adults do not *all of a sudden* wake up embodying beliefs of superiority. They were once children who went through a process of constructing their adult identities. Because racial identities form at an early age, researchers must gather information about how White children are

constructing their racial selves so that researchers, educators, parents, and policy makers can better understand how to help White youth construct anti-racist identities.

It is difficult to acknowledge the impact racism has on White people because it pales in comparison to being the victim of racial oppression. Nonetheless, there are negative effects White people experience regarding racism. Thandeka (1999) writes, "The first racial victim of the white community is its own child" (p. viii). She included this statement not to erase the victimization of people of color, but to shine a light where racialized violence begins. Similar to other victims of abuse, White children project abuse, and people of color are the recipients. No longer can we focus solely on restoring children of color's wholeness after they have been subjected to racialized violence. This is reactive. A proactive approach would examine the place whence the harm flows and work upstream toward addressing at least one of the sources. To do so, it is imperative to gain an understanding of how White youth understand their racial identity so that developing an anti-racist identity can begin much sooner than adulthood.

I use Helms' (1993) definition of the Autonomy stage, though I believe identities are iterative and not fixed, to define an anti-racist identity. Therefore, an anti-racist White person is one who "no longer feels a need to oppress, idealize, or denigrate people on the basis of group membership characteristics such as race because race no longer symbolizes a threat to him or her" (pp. 62 & 66). I nuance this definition by offering *who no longer, whether consciously or subconsciously, feels a need to oppress*. This additional statement is an intentional effort to recognize subconscious bias, where people are not aware of their feelings or beliefs. This work is important because racism has negative health, economic, educational, social, and political outcomes, not only for people of color, but also for Whites (Thandeka, 1999; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). In fact, Sue (2005) concluded that White people who adhere to

racist practices "[exchange their] humanity for the power, wealth and status attained through the oppression of others" (p. 111). For those who choose to challenge white supremacy, they are caught in a constant internal struggle to accept reality, one where they acknowledge their own complicity in the oppression of others (Thandeka, 1999; Sue, 2005).

Background of DPI

The foundation. DPI is an organization I co-founded with my partner, Dr. Daniel Kelvin Bullock. The organization works to dismantle systemic racism in education through offering anti-racism summer camps for kids, workshops for parents, and professional development for educators. We offer one five-day camp for kids in first through second grade and another for kids in third through fifth grade. We target White families and spaces because research shows that White people opting for colorblind approaches are not as likely as people of color to have race-based conversations in their homes (Aboud and Doyle, 1996; Pahlke, Bigler, and Suizzo, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Summer camp goals. The DPI Summer Camps have three goals: 1) to foster healthy racial identities in children, 2) to build a historical understanding of race and racism, and 3) to equip families with tools and resources to extend anti-racist practices in the home and community. We use a literacy-based curriculum to engage students in conversations that explicitly address race, racism, anti-racism, and activism.

Summer camps for elementary students. I chose to create camps for young children because I believed that anti-racist identities should be intentionally nurtured during early childhood. Having too many negative encounters with adult educators, particularly White teachers, led me to believe that, for many, it was too late. It *felt* like it was too late for White educators to develop an anti-racist identity of any substance. Many had years of building biased

walls that were too wide and too deep to overcome. Even though my personal experiences have created a less-than- hopeful stance on the impact of anti-bias training with adults, research shows that such work can influence the thoughts and behaviors of educators (Lawrence and Tatum, 2004). Lawrence and Tatum (1998) found "that anti-racist teaching built upon a sound blend of psychological and pedagogical theories can be instrumental in assisting White educators, both in development of their racial identities and in a re-visioning of their current curriculum" (p. 10). As such, possibility for continuous growth and learning exists. I believed, however, that by working with children prior to their enduring years of exposure to biases and bigotry, I could find more hope in the "becoming" process (Morrison, 1992; Thandeka, 1999) of creating a racial identity. The foundations of our racial identities begin in early childhood. It only made sense to work with children before they become resistant adults (McIntyre, 1997), so that the likelihood of adopting an anti-racist identity was more feasible.

Site of Research

I chose DPI Summer Camps as the site for my study for several reasons. First, it was convenient. I am one of the co-facilitators of the camps; therefore, I would be in a space where I would not have to overcome structural barriers, such as approval from a school district or pushback from parents who were uncomfortable with their children being observed through a racialized lens. Parents who signed up their child or children up for an anti-racism summer camp, I assumed, were committed to racial equity and may have been more willing to participate in a study about race. Additionally, parents who enrolled their children in the camps were probably already embodying some form of social justice in their homes. I was curious to see how their children constructed whiteness. I imagined I would observe behaviors, thoughts, and conversations that I would not find in a general camp or classroom community.

Research Questions

In this study, I explored what White children understand about whiteness. Two questions guided my work:

1. What does White racial identity construction look like for White children participating in an anti-racism summer camp?
2. How do White children normalize or resist whiteness?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, I focused on White children's identity and not children of color. This approach is similar to Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), Rogers and Mosely (2006), and Miller (2015); it is uncommon. Findings from this study will, therefore, fill a gap in the literature.

Second, it is significant because it is timely. In a society where Dylann Storm Roof murdered nine Black people at the Emanuel African Methodist Church in South Carolina, where several hundred Nazis marched openly in Charlottesville, Virginia, shouting "Jews will not replace us!" and where the 45th national leader of our country failed to condemn these acts as an abomination, there needs to be a much stronger emphasis on what it means to become White. These incidents of overt racism demonstrate a clear need to understand whiteness. Additionally, racism is simultaneously occurring in less overt ways. Sue (2005) argues that if we solely categorize racism as "extreme acts of hatred," we "engage in self-deception" by thinking that we, ourselves, cannot hold racially prejudiced beliefs (p. 107).

Third, this study is significant because I studied the children of parents who chose to send their kids to an anti-racism summer camp. Many may erroneously believe that these children would not embody racial biases. Sullivan (2006) and Miller (2015), though, caution that

whiteness is normalized in subtle ways such as through intonation and in media advertisements. In well-intentioned homes, white superiority is reified. How Whites view themselves impacts how they treat others (Thandeka, 1999; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Helms, 1997). In order for Black and Brown children to have better educational experiences and outcomes, we need to understand how White children construct their racial identity. I always return to Black and Brown children's experiences because I do not want to get lost trying to understanding White children without naming whom they impact. This is akin to talking about White privilege while leaving out the subordination of people of color. I believe that the liberation of people of color is tied to White children's ability to develop an anti-racist identity. This study's findings are significant for society at large but can be of particular importance for three specific audiences: elementary educators, White parents, and policymakers. Below I provide specifics.

For elementary educators. Educators play a vital role in shaping children's identities (Miller, 2015a). As they become more aware of their students' abilities to make sense of race, they can actively become a part of creating anti-racist learning environments and curriculum. Many educators are apprehensive about discussing race and racism with children, while others erroneously believe that children do not see color (Miller, 2015a). Current literature demonstrates that children make sense of skin color at a young age, and schools should be places that challenge stereotypical beliefs about groups of people (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Gibson, Smith, Ge, & Pascalis, 2005; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). Transformational learning is possible when educators are committed to creating a socially just world with our youngest students.

For White parents. It is well-known among Black communities that Black parents have *the talk* with our children. The purpose of this talk is to equip our children with knowledge about the racist world around them—to tell them that their Black skin holds meaning in this world, and that others, White people particularly, will judge and mistreat them due to the color of their skin. Most Black families know this is a necessary rite of passage for survival. Colorblind ideologies and a reticence to talking about race prevent some White parents from believing these conversations are necessary (Phalke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Njoroge, Benton, Lewis, & Njoroge, 2009). With the current Black Lives Matter movement and emphasis on police brutality, Black parents are having these conversations more frequently (Bouchard, 2016). White parents should be having a parallel conversation about racism. Data from my study will help White parents understand the need for their own *talk* and will let them know what needs to be included.

For policymakers. To date, there has not been a systematic effort to provide anti-racist education through our schools. As the United States continues to grapple with ways to respond to the recent uptick in racialized violence since the 2016 presidential election season, we should pass policies that prioritize racial equity. Policymakers can use data from this study to advocate for curriculum shifts that address early racist formations, beginning with elementary-aged children. Racial equity standards, which hold school systems accountable for teaching about race and identity, would be a transformational place to start.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

I used a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework to guide this study. Through this lens, race was the central focus, and I interpreted all data with an emphasis on the role race plays in connection with power and oppression. I wore these metaphorical glasses as I observed the interplay of whiteness as explained through White Critical Theory (WhiteCrit), critical discourse analysis, and racial identity construction (see Figure 1.1). This conceptual framework helped me integrate multiple theories and perspectives as I conducted the literature review and

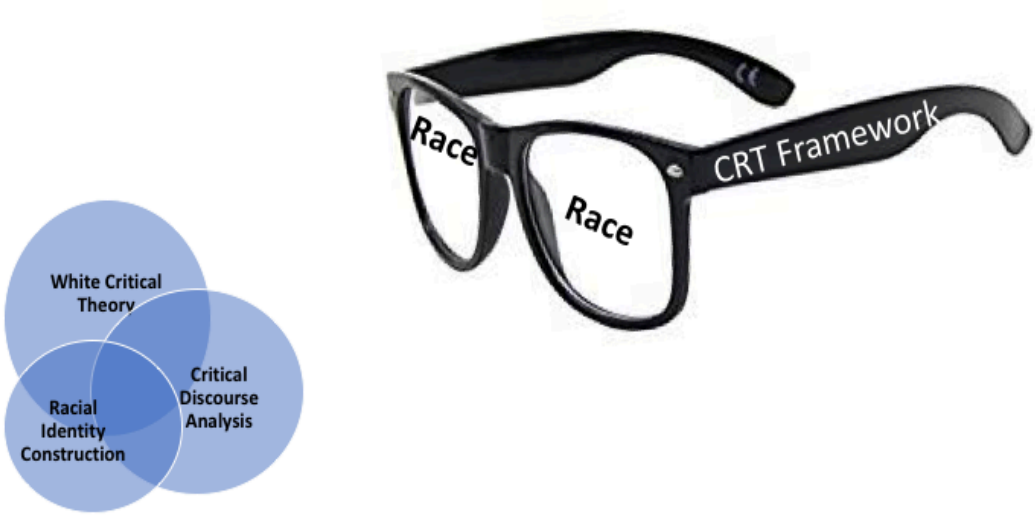


Figure 1.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

interpreted the data (Imenda, 2014). The glasses in Figure 1.1 are situated looking to the left, or backward rather than forward, because the history of racial formation is significant to understanding present realities (Parsons & Turner, 2014). The literature review for this study, as represented in Chapter Two, provides an in-depth exploration of the historical evolution of race in the United States. Even though this current study focused on children, trying to make sense of how they embodied and understood whiteness today would be incomplete without a holistic representation of how race came into existence. The literature review reflects a deep dive into history because it informs the present and sets the stage for race as a social construct.

Critical race theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as the main framework for this study. CRT emerged from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) around the 1970s (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1987; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CLS analyzes the law and ways in which a hierarchical structure benefits certain groups of people (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1987; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT scholars critiqued CLS for not focusing on the way race disproportionately impacted people of color while benefiting Whites (Bell, 1992).

CRT is a framework that asserts racism is endemic to and permanent in society. CRT situates race and racism at the center of analysis, and incorporates an intersection of race, class, and gender (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In education research, CRT asserts that:

1) Race and racism is centralized in all studies, along with the intersections of other forms of oppression such as gender, class, and legal status.
2) Dominant perspectives should be challenged through the telling of counter-narratives, voices from marginalized communities.
3) A social justice agenda must always be present.
4) Experiential knowledge is valued knowledge. The voices of people of color should be centered in attempts to right social wrongs.
5) The world is complex, comprised of myriad components and research should represent diverse perspectives (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001).

CRT posits a structural analysis of racism. Racism is much more than ideological beliefs and instances of individual meanness. Racism was legally sanctioned and woven into the immoral fabric of our society dating back to laws established in the mid to late 1600s (Harris, 1993). This legalized racial discrimination serves to maintain White supremacy, secure White privilege, and perpetuate a system of anti-blackness and subordination (Bell, 1992; Harris, 1993).

Further, CRT challenges the normalization and invisibility of whiteness as the dominant perspective. Whiteness is often contrasted to the *other*, with the other being people of color (Harris, 1993). The use of counternarratives, allowing the voices of marginalized communities to be heard and validated, aids in deconstructing this normalization (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002).

I pulled from the first three tenets listed above for my study. Race and racism were, first of all, key focal points. Second, I used my voice and perspective, as a Black female researcher, to tell a story about White children. This was a deliberate effort to uphold what Black feminist scholar bell hooks (1992) coined as the oppositional gaze. The oppositional gaze is the recalcitrant look of Blacks who challenged the White supremacist power structures and declared, as hooks (1992) notes, "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" (p. 180). Whites punished enslaved Blacks for looking in general, but also for gazing at Whites (hooks, 1992). Consequently, my research project about White children's racial identity represents a counternarrative and a rebellious gaze. Last, while CRT promotes a structural analysis to disrupting racism and fighting for social justice, the study did not directly create systemic change. I used the study results, though, to make recommendations for policy and school curriculum revisions, thus furthering social justice efforts.

White critical theory. White Critical Theory (WhiteCrit), which is derived from CRT, centers whiteness as a necessary part of the conversations involving racial analyses (Harris, 1993; Twine and Gallagher, 2008). This centering, however, should not be done in a way that silences the voices of people of color. Whiteness studies argues that whiteness is race privilege that is structural and systemic; it is hierarchical in that Whites view racial others from a superior position, and it embodies cultural beliefs and practices that are normalized (Harris, 1993; Twine

and Gallagher, 2008). Additionally, White supremacy is upheld and maintained through whiteness, which affords White people material, social, and psychological advantages (Bell, 1992; Harris, 1993). Lipsitz (1998) and Harris (1993) argue that an investment in whiteness allows whiteness to function as property—something in which to invest, that holds value and power, that allows one the right to exclude, and that gives one access to spaces and places. Whiteness as property affords Whites a material wage, one that Lipsitz (1998) believes bestows a benefit that

> accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations (p. vii).

Over the years, whiteness as property has taken on nuanced forms, making it less visible but still very real and present (Harris, 1993; Lewis, 2004; Lipsitz, 1998). This new racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) gives a different meaning to Ralph Ellison's (2010) *Invisible Man.*

The protagonist character in *Invisible Man* (2010) is an unnamed African American man growing up in the South. The domineering presence of White supremacy renders him invisible due to the color of his skin. White people refuse to see him. This form of invisibility strips him of power and humanity and denies him access to spaces. In contrast, the invisibility of whiteness grants its owners unearned power, prestige, and a seat at the table. These privileges pass as benefits of individual merit. It is not that White people are invisible to Blacks, but rather the systems that uphold Whites' status are often obscured. For White people, invisibility functions as power but for Blacks as subordination. CRT and WhiteCrit illuminate this juxtaposition, making the invisible visible, allowing activists to see exactly what we are fighting to dismantle. I used WhiteCrit to shine a light on the formation of whiteness and how White children embody it.

Critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) emerged during the 1990s out of critical theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Critical theorists believed that rather than merely describing life, life should be critiqued in a way that works toward improving society (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Additionally, Gee (2005) noted that critical theorists moved beyond understanding social relationships to analyzing them "in terms of their implications for things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power" (p. 23). Therefore, with CDA discourses include but are not limited to language, how we construct reality, sounds, gestures, and behaviors (Gee, 2005). Van Djik (1993) discussed three principals of CDA: 1) Emphasis on the role of power in constituting inequity and dominance; 2) Avoidance of apolitical stances; neutrality is not an option; and 3) Structural analysis connected to context. Van Djik argued that CDA scholars should challenge hegemony and prioritize the perspectives of those who are marginalized. I used the principles of CDA to analyze how White children make sense of their racial identity while interacting with others at the camps.

My Positionality

Where are you from?

I am from late nights, rocking my brown babies, Zion & Zaire to sleep

I am from shucking corn and bailing hay under the hot summer sun

I am from fresh cut grass and sweet honeysuckle

I am from my ancestor's wildest dreams

I am from resistance

This poem is an adaption of an introductory activity used to challenge traditional ways of introducing ourselves. SpiritHouse, a local nonprofit organization led by women of color, designed this tool for use at community-building events. CRT posits that counternarratives are a

necessary disruption to the status quo. As such, my voice is a counternarrative, and I use my positionality statement to move from the margins to the center.

When race became real. Growing up in Goldston, NC, I attended a predominately white elementary school (kindergarten – 8th grade) and high school. Ironically, my elementary school was once the all-Black school for kids in our area. My racial experiences through the school system have shaped and molded me into the anti-racist activist that I am today. Race became real to me at five years old. I was in kindergarten, sitting at a round table where I was the only Black student. One of the young White girls invited everyone at our table to her birthday party, except for me. Being the inquisitive child that I was, I asked her why she excluded me. I do not recall her exact words, but she said something like, "You can't come to my birthday party because my dad said that Black people are not allowed in our home." At the time, I did not understand what this meant. I remember my mom turning to my dad in shock, I imagine, when I recounted this story to her. Her response was, "Ronda, we don't invite ourselves to other people's birthday parties." I did not believe I had done this, but I chose to accept my mom's response. Her answer sufficed until it happened again when I was seven. The situation was similar, but the setting was different.

I was the only Black Girl Scout in our troop, and we were out performing community service. The other girls were huddled up, talking in a circle. When I walked upon the group, everyone stopped talking. Of course, I immediately assumed they were talking about me. I had not lost my inquisitive nature at seven, so I asked my best friend why everyone got quiet. She looked at me and lamented, "Ronda, please don't be mad at me. I'm having a birthday party today, and my dad said that you can't come because you're Black." I thought I understood more at seven than I did at five. This encounter hurt because I believed something was wrong with

me. Just like before, I shared the story with my mom, but this time, she talked to me about racism, slavery, and Abraham Lincoln freeing the slaves. As an adult, I have learned that Lincoln was much more complicated than my mom shared, but at the time she did her best to explain a complex topic to a young child.

These two early experiences with race and racism solidified my desires to better understand how the two operate in this world. I have been awakening since I was five years old. This journey into understanding my role in creating a socially just world has been a beautiful struggle.

Motherscholar. Cheryl Matias (DePouw & Matias, 2016) coined the word *motherscholar*, meaning existing as both a mother and scholar. These two identities work in tandem and represent me. I am a mother of two Black babies, one boy and one girl; thus I think about race and racism beyond myself. I grew up on the defensive side in dealing with issues of racism. Now that I'm responsible for my children, I'm more interested in being on the offensive. I desire to shift the racialized gaze toward White youth and the ways in which they are socialized to be perpetrators of race-based violence. Using CRT, with an emphasis on whiteness studies, I'm just as interested in arming White youth against white supremacy as I am arming Black.

Educator experience. Prior to enrolling in a doctoral program at UNC Chapel Hill, I taught high school English and mentored beginning teachers at a historically Black school for almost ten years. My last year there, I co-planned and facilitated a six-session anti-racism institute for educators called, *Daring Dialogue.* The idea for this institute came to me after a racist incident occurred in our building where several White teachers wore white t-shirts on the last day of school. The shirts featured what appeared to be an all-White faculty photo between the words "Wildershnitzel Family Renion" (it was supposed to say "Reunion"). The photo was

nestled in the poppy seed field from the movie *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939). There was also a flying monkey placed prominently on the front of the shirt.

Needless to say, this act of the White teachers elicited much racial tension and angst among the teachers of color. I facilitated a conversation with the staff at the small school so that we could get answers as to why the teachers wore the shirt. By the end of the conversation, the White teachers revealed that they created the shirts as a joke because the students often told the White teachers that they looked alike. They also shared that they never considered the racial implications of their actions. I was devastated by their level of ignorance and could only imagine what other racist things they had blindly said or done to our Black and Brown students. Looking back, *Daring Dialogue* was probably my first organized, anti-racist event.

Because I am the sum of all of my experiences, who I am has impacted my study and analysis. My interests in better understanding white children's racial identity construction is connected to the life I have had and continue to live.

Study Limitations

It is important to mention the limitations of my study. First, there was a potential threat credibility. It is difficult for children to participate in member checking, as a means to establish research trustworthiness. One way to mitigate this risk was to use parents as reviewers of the data and analysis; however, I wanted the focus of the study to be about children in their natural setting and not adult interpretations of children. Instead, I consulted three researchers to review the data and my findings as a means of peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Another limitation was that the study participants were highly selective. Parents who sent their children to an anti-racism camp were not representative of the general population of White families. This

study, however, was not designed to be generalizable, and there was value in learning about a subset of our population.

Key Terms and Definitions

1. **Black-** I use *Black* to reference people who phenotypically and ethnically share a common African ancestry. I capitalize the *B* in line with APA capitalization standards.
2. **Construction-** I use *construction* to mean the ways in people create ideas through their thoughts, actions, and discourse.
3. **Discourse-** I use *discourse* to refer to the language, both verbal and nonverbal, used to communicate ideas.
4. **Identity-** I define *identity* as the characteristics that contribute to who a person is. These characteristics may be individual or shared among a group.
5. **Marginalized-** I use *marginalized* to reference people or ideas that have been made insignificant by the dominant culture.
6. **People of color-** My use of *people of color* refers to people who are not White.
7. **Race-** When I use race, I align with CRT scholars who define it as a social construct Whites created to institute a hierarchy that privileges those who are White.
8. **Racism-** When I use *racism*, I am referring to the system of racial privilege and power Whites created to keep people of color in subordinate positions in society.
9. **White-** I use *White* to reference people who phenotypically and ethnically share a common European ancestry. I capitalize the *W* in line with APA capitalization standards.
10. **Whiteness-** My use of *whiteness* reflects the beliefs and actions Whites use to maintain social dominance over marginalized communities through power and violence.

11. **White supremacy-** I use *white supremacy* to reference the systematic use of power—through laws, policies, education, etc.—to keep Whites in a superior position in society at the expense of people of color.

Conclusion to Chapter 1

Research studies dedicated to understanding race and racism have put people of color under a microscope. This microscope contributes to otherizing marginalized communities, as if we are deviants from the norm. In Chapter One, I argued for shifting the gaze to White communities, looking particularly at White children. I hope that studying their racial identity construction will guide us on a journey to creating the socially just society in which many of us desire to live. In the subsequent chapters, I present a literature review for the study, discuss my methodology, share findings, and provide implications for the findings.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of this case study is to explore how White children construct their racial identity. I used critical race theory (CRT) and White critical theory (WhiteCrit) to frame the study. Aligned with CRT tenets, race is central to the study, and as a form of praxis, I will use my findings to further anti-racism work in my local community through grassroots efforts and policy change. I am a Black woman researching whiteness and White children in particular. My study is a counternarrative.

In this chapter I will share the purpose and significance of studying whiteness, state my positionality, provide an overview of the history and construction of whiteness, explain how whiteness is reified in policies and practices, and explain examples of whiteness studies in the disciplines of education, psychology, and sociology. Studies regarding race, racism, and racial identity have largely been relegated to studies of people of color and how we, as Black and Brown folks, have traditionally navigated our survival in a white supremacist world. As such, in order to the shift the gaze, I will conclude this review with studies regarding how White youth construct their racial identity (see Appendix 1 for rational behind literature selection).

Purpose

Whiteness is dominant, hierarchical, and structural. It replicates and re-invents itself. It is both visible and invisible. It takes and demands the center almost every single time. How, then, does one study whiteness without centering it? As a socially constructed phenomenon, whiteness was created in such a way that it is practically impossible to learn more about it without keeping the concept at the center, which in essence, has been part of the longstanding

problem with white supremacy. The purpose of this literature review is to connect how White people created race to the formation of White children's racial identity construction.

Significance

White adults are often the focus of whiteness studies; however, they do not wake up all of a sudden as representatives of their race. They spent years becoming and embodying their racial selves (Cross, 2001; Thandeka, 1999; Morrison, 1992), and rather than looking back on childhood from an adult-centric perspective, we need to look at White children during their actual childhood. Rather than starting at this point, though, it is necessary to dive into the history of racial formation because for one, this history is rarely known, and two, because it explains how embedded race is into our individual and collective racial existence.

Positionality

As an African American female, I bring a racialized lens to the study. My earliest memory of a racial experience occurred at five-years-old in my kindergarten class, when another White female student said, "You can't come to my birthday party because my dad said that Black people are not allowed in our home." The student was clearly instituting whiteness as property in exercising her power to exclude and deny access to space (Harris, 1993). Since then, the onslaught of racial micro-aggressions coupled with both overt racist experiences have continued to pique my interest in learning how racism, with a focus on whiteness specifically, exists and persists as an ideology in its youngest perpetrators.

Whiteness: Another Invisible Man

Racial formation. Contrary to what many believe to be true, race is not biological; race is a social construct (Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006 Harris, 1993; Bell, 1991; Lipsitz,1998). Therefore, people are not born White, but go through a process of *becoming* White (Morrison,

1992; Leonardo, 2004; Thandeka, 1999). Black scholars have written for years on whiteness. W.E.B. DuBois (1935) provided some of the earliest critical analysis of White racial formation. According to him, immigrant workers coming to America in the late 1700s and early 1800s found material and psychological benefits to adopting White identity with those in power, over joining forces with the freed Black workers and those who were enslaved (DuBois, 1935; Twine and Gallagher, 2008). These immigrant workers observed the ways in which the dominant group used capitalism and labor exploitation to move out of poverty. They came to understand that access to land and voting rights meant access to power. While all immigrants did not receive equal material benefits of adopting a White identity, they received the psychological benefits of knowing that at the end of the day, at least they were not Black (DuBois, 1935; Thandeka, 1999; Harris, 1993).

Material benefits to whiteness were written into Virginia's laws in the late 1600s. Many of the laws were a response to working class laborers aligning their class oppression with those of free and enslaved Blacks (Thandeka, 1999). In 1676, Nathaniel Bacon led freemen, both Black and White, in a rebellion against the ruling elite (Thandeka, 1999). Jamestown was nearly destroyed, and lawmakers knew they had to create a divide in order to prevent future collusion and revolts along class lines (DuBois, 1935; Thandeka, 1999; Lipsitz,). As such, poor Whites were allowed certain privileges, such as the ability to whip a Black slave without retribution (Thandeka, 1999). These race laws helped to solidify poor Whites allegiance to the dominant class, affording them class privileges that they did not previously have. Additionally, the right to use violence against Blacks further created "racial contempt" (Thandeka, 1999, p. 46), widening the chasm between White laborers and free and enslaved Blacks.

In 1705, the Virginia legislature, adding to the race laws, mandated masters give White indentured servants fifty acres of land, along with items such as clothes and food, upon the completion of their servitude (Thandeka, 1999). The class struggle faded in many Whites' mind as they could now associate themselves with the elites. As this association grew, their disdain for Blacks intensified, as well. Enslaved and freed Blacks were viewed as competition and blamed for lowering wages. How could a White laborer who needed money to feed his family compete with the free labor of enslaved persons? Further, how could they compete when their skill level was often not as high as many of the enslaved men? Adding additional perspective, roughly 25% of White laborers could read and write (DuBois, 1935), so many were ignorant with limited opportunities available to them. Thus, the division worked, and a permanent hostility was born.

Culture of Dominance

The construction of whiteness was about more than just class division and racial animus: whiteness involved state sanctioned racial domination and supremacy. In *Learning to Be White* (1999), Thandeka noted that race laws "legislated [white's] right to feel superior to all nonwhites" (p. 46). She was particularly referencing poor Whites' elevated status by means of laws that afforded them privileges over the enslaved; however, this feeling of superiority reverberated for all Whites. Thandeka (1999) also acknowledged that Virginia's slave laws set a sinister precedent for other colonies to follow. She explained that, as a nation, colonies were "on the road to establishing a legal caste system that would be based on the precept of [B]lack inferiority and [W]hite superiority" (p. 47). Thandeka (1999) cautioned that we remember that White racism was from the start a vehicle for classism; its primary goal was not to elevate

a race but to denigrate a class. White racism was thus a means to an end, and the end was the defense of Virginia's class structure and the further subjugation of the poor of all "racial" colors (p. 47). Uplift and debasement go hand-in-hand when it comes to the social construction of whiteness. One does not exist without the other.

The ownership and debasement of Blacks, though treated as property, was a goal or coveted prize White workers sought. In *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (1935), DuBois explained, "But above and beyond this, it fed [the White worker's] vanity because it associated him with the masters…If he had any ambition at all, it was to become a planter and to own 'niggers'" (p. 12). Owning another human being literally put Whites in a different class.

White racial dominance was reified not only through ownership over other human beings, but also through the law. Whites created Black codes to deepen their collective power. Blacks, whether free or enslaved, could not own property, travel without a permit, own weapons vote, testify, bring a case to court, or be considered a citizen (Harris, 1993). All of these privileges, however, were granted to White males. As will be explained later, additional policies and laws came after the codes were put in place to strengthen structural racism, cementing whiteness into society and creating a wage for the color of white skin.

White Wage

Whiteness comes with a wage, or type of value. Whiteness became something that people could own and physically possess. DuBois (1935) professed that even though White workers received meager earnings, "they were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage" (p. 700). He listed that White workers received "public deference," traveled freely with other Whites in public spaces, voted on governing officials, had "schoolhouses [that] were the best in the community," and had newspapers that portrayed them

through the most positive lenses (DuBois, 1935, p. 700-701). Using DuBois' (1935) description of white wages, Harris (1993) further explained how whiteness took on the value of property. She noted during slavery, white became synonymous with free and black synonymous with slave (Harris, 1993). To be White meant that one was free. This association served as the building blocks to transition whiteness to property.

Whiteness as property. Whiteness as property began to formalize as many law cases existed where people sued for the right to be considered White or at least not Black. For example, Lopez (2004) further illustrates this point referencing the *Hudgins v. Wright* (1806) and *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) cases. The Wright family sued Hudgins, a slave master who hoped to move the enslaved Wright family out of Virginia, arguing that they should be considered free because they were not Black, but Indian. During this time, only Whites and Indians were considered free, without having to provide substantial proof of their lineage. Due to an arbitrary test of examining one of the plaintiff's straight hair, which was unlike Negro hair, the plaintiffs were considered Indian and allowed to be free (Lopez, 1994). Regarding *Ozawa v. United States* (1922), Takao Ozawa was a Japanese man who applied for US citizenship on the basis that his skin color was *white* (Lopez, 1994). However, the court ruled that the color of one's skin was insufficient evidence to prove one was indeed White; thus, Ozawa's appeal for citizenship was denied. Both *Hudgins v. Wright* (1806) and *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) demonstrated how arbitrarily whiteness was defined. Moreover, both cases also demonstrated that freedom and citizenship not only belonged to Whites, but also that they were the arbiters for who was allowed to be considered White.

Harris (1993) notes that the law reified whiteness by treating the possession of it as property. In other words, rules that governed property could also be applied to whiteness. For

example, the possession of whiteness allowed one the "right to transfer or alienability, the right to use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude others" (Harris, 1993, p. 281), along with forms of social and cultural capital (Twine and Gallagher, 2008). Exclusion was a salient tool used to reinforce whiteness (Lopez, 1994; Leonardo, 2004; Harris, 1993; Thandeka, 1999). Embracing the ideological beliefs of white supremacy meant being included in an exclusive group. Even though poorer White laborers were marginalized Whites, they still had their skin color that elevated them above Blacks (Harris, 1993; Thandeka, 1999; Lopez, 1994).

Ironically, as Whites evolved their whiteness into property, they simultaneously reduced slaves to property as a form of subordination. Harris (1993) explains that the boundaries between Blacks and property were eliminated. Slaves could be purchased, "transferred, assigned, inherited, or posted as collateral" (Harris, 1993, p. 279). Slaves, considered three fifths of man in the United States Constitution, were treated like chattel. Whites and Blacks becoming property was a form of dual dehumanization with vastly different long-term consequences. This mirror effect, was the basis of whiteness as an oppositional identity (Thandeka, 1999; Twine and Gallagher, 2008; Morrison, 1992; Lopez, 1994). Without Blacks, Whites would not exist.

Oppositional Identity

Whiteness was not established in a vacuum; Whites created it as an identity in relation to other races, particularly Blacks (Thandeka, 1999; Twine and Gallagher, 2008; Morrison, 1992; Lopez, 1994). DuBois (1935), Morrison (1992), Thandeka (1999), and Sullivan (2006) all posit that whiteness is an oppositional identity, and it draws its strength through comparison to darker peoples. Looking at whiteness as an oppositional identity shifts the conversation away from privilege to shame. Thandeka (1999), in *Learning to Be White*, uses a fence metaphor to help illustrate this point.

In describing the "white racial induction process" (p. 29), which occurs typically throughout the youth and young adult years, Thandeka (1999) alludes to the confinement created by fences. She references language such as "racial exile" (p. 9), "forbidden to venture beyond the gates of their backyard" (p. 11), "separateness and isolation" (p. 18), and "self-alienation" (p.19) to establish that becoming White was about creating boundaries to keep the nonwhite *other* out, while holding the whiteness inside. Daring to transcend these hidden fences was a double-edged sword. If one was successful, in transcending these hidden fences, then banishment from the White community and one's own family was imminent (Thandeka, 1999). If one failed, then he or she lost a sense of humanity and suffered from "repressed desires" (Thandeka, 1999, p. 26) in order to keep one's place within the White community. Pain, a sense of loss, and shame resided behind this "fenced-in feeling" (p. 20), created when being forced to choose whiteness. This pain, however, is occurring at a subconscious level and is not always acknowledged by those experiencing it (Thandeka, 1999).

The metaphorical fences were present throughout Thandeka's (1999) book. Living within constricted boundaries created much internal conflict for Whites. In fact, becoming White meant a denial of one's self and humanity. When a person is not allowed to be one's authentic self, he or she often finds a way to release that pent-up frustration. This is shown as Thandeka explains Whites' obsession with blackface:

> Their attachment to the black image was a desire to recover feelings that for themselves as 'whites' were intolerable, but as prewhites, were the hallmarks of their humanity: sensuality, sexuality, free play, the premodern home, whimsy, strutting, zipping, dashing, clowning, cooing, cooning (p. 70).

In essence, White males performing in blackface was about a projection of themselves, their inner selves, that was confined behind invisible borders. Blackface simply allowed them freedom to move beyond the racial fence without consequence.

Toni Morrison (1992) also writes about the creation of whiteness as an oppositional identity in her book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. She analyzes the way White authors create whiteness through literature. White American writers' depictions of Blacks, according to Morrison (1992), said as much about them as it did about their objectified characters. American Africanism was a tool for writers to establish a master narrative about a mythical Black people. They used blackness for whatever purpose they needed, and oftentimes to establish a White identity. In doing so, authors created an interesting juxtaposition between freedom and bondage. According to Morrison, freedom was depicted through enslavement. She used an excerpt from author Bernard Bailyn's (1986) *Voyages to the West* to help illustrate this point. In the text, Bailyn (1986) described William Dunbar, a character who was a distinguished, highly educated Scot who dared to venture West. However, it was not until Dunbar gained absolute authority over Black bodies that he found himself, his true identity:

> Endlessly enterprising and resourceful, his finer sensibilities dulled by the abrasions of frontier life, and feeling within himself a sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others, he emerged a distinct new man, a borderland gentleman, a man of property in a raw, half-savage world (p. 42).

Not only did taking other people's freedom give Dunbar a life he had never had, it also gave him his manhood—something his education and previous elite lifestyle could not afford. In essence, the White man's validation and power were tied to Black bodies; therefore, without Black bodies, his life lacked substance (Morrison, 1992). This is ironic, though, considering Dunbar came from an elite background. Should not his wealth and class status have been sufficient for his livelihood?

Morrison (1992) further highlights this point of oppositional identity through the relationship of two White characters from an Ernest Hemingway (1937) text, *To Have and Have*

Not. Harry and Marie, two of the main characters, spend time visiting Cuba. During one excursion, Harry violently confronted a Black male who spoke to Marie. Afterwards, Marie bleached her hair from a dark color to blonde, symbolically representing a transition from black to white (Morrison, 1992). Both of these incidences allowed Harry and Marie to gain power and establish themselves as different from the Black male character. Morrison (1992) said that this depiction of Africanism "becomes not only a means of displaying authority but, in fact, constitutes its source" (p. 80). Morrison's literary analysis is key to understanding the construction of whiteness. Morrison argues that whiteness is created and recreated in the literary imaginary. Therefore, texts such as Bailyn and Hemmingway's are used to establish and perpetuate whiteness as an oppositional identity.

Visibility

The permanence of whiteness largely hinges on its ability to be invisible; this is by design (Morrison, 1992; Lopez, 1994; Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006; Lipsitz, 1998; Leonardo, 2004; Twine and Gallagher, 2008). Lipsitz (1998), in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,* notes that while whiteness permeates all parts of our society, "it is very hard to see" (p. 1). He further notes that "as an unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (Lipsitz, 1998, p. 1). Further, cultural arbitrary is a cultural form adopted by the state, those in power, used to subjugate others to a standard or norm that is superficially relevant (English and Bolton, 2016). Cultural arbitrary is used to shape reality and is perpetuated as the "right way", rendering it invisible (English and Bolton, 2016). As previously mentioned, whiteness is inextricably connected to white supremacy. Thus, part of the battle in

challenging white supremacy is convincing people, particularly White people, that it exists, is real, and carries privileges for some and disadvantage for others.

Sullivan (2006) argues that many White people actively work to remain unaware of the privileges afforded them. Many of these privileges, according to Whites, are considered normal benefits, and if someone else is not receiving them, then they are doing something wrong. This is just the way that things are. If normalization is not the go-to answer, then the privileges are linked to meritocracy, pulling oneself up by their bootstraps (Lipsitz, 1998; Sullivan, 2006; Lopez, 1994; Thandeka, 1999; Crenshaw, 1988). Sullivan (2006), in *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privileges*, professes that "any emotion that threatens white privilege must be transformed into a different emotion that does not conflict with it" (p. 56). This form of cognitive dissonance allows the status quo to remain in place.

White fragility and visibility. Scholar Robin DiAngelo (2011) coined the term white fragility, which is related to how Whites respond when their race is made visible to others and the status quo is challenged. In essence, their response is a reaction to feeling hyper-visible, when normally Whites are afforded invisibility. White fragility, then, is an emotional state where talking about race or racism elicits discomfort in Whites, "triggering a range of defensive moves" (p. 57). In order to restore "white racial equilibrium," Whites typically will exhibit emotional distress, including but not limited to rage, disengagement, and argumentativeness (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 57). These emotions are typically used to detract from moving racial progress forward. For example, DiAngelo (2015) proclaims in *White Women's Tears and the Men Who Love Them*, that White people's emotions have the power, in settings such as anti-racism trainings, to reify racism. Attention is commandeered away from people of color and

diverted to the White person who is uncomfortable. In these instances, White people's pain is prioritized over Black and Brown people's livelong experiences.

Growing up in racially isolated spaces fosters experiences where racialized habits, beliefs and behaviors often go unchecked (McIntyre, 1997; Thandeka, 1999; DiAngelo, 2011; English & Bolton, 2016). Whites living in insular neighborhoods produces what Bourdieu termed as habitus. Habitus is the living environment that shapes a person's characteristics and life chances, whether intentional or unintentional (English and Bolton, 2016). Within the habitus, both a person's past and future are impacted. This aligns with Thandeka's (1999) assertions that the preservation of whiteness results in harm and a sense of loss that Whites experience from childhood through adulthood.

Whites, in essence, engage in an idolatry of whiteness within their communities, contributing to solipsism. White solipsism, Sullivan (2006) argues, creates the false reality that society is comprised of just White people. Further, this ideology proposes a *white is right* mentality which contributes to *group think*; therefore, whatever White people do, regardless of morality, must be ok. This results in a lack of endurance or "stamina" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 57) to handle situations where others make whiteness visible and challenge it through discussion. The inability to handle these situations connects back to white fragility.

From Privilege to Supremacy

The advantages afforded to Whites due to the color of their skin are called white privilege. As aforementioned, these privileges are unearned, reified through law, and seem so normal that these privileges are rendered invisible (Morrison, 1992; Lopez, 1994; Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006; Lipsitz, 1998; Leonardo, 2004; Twine and Gallagher, 2008). Many attempts to uncover these hidden, yet material advantages, seem to obfuscate Whites who

fervently deny their existence. Scholar Peggy McIntosh (1988), author of *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, helps us to name these often-unnoticed advantages, whether to represent oneself as an individual and not a group or having the freedom of not be racially profiled. McIntosh's emphasis, though, fails to encompass the systemic nature of whiteness and locates many of these privileges at the individual level (Leonardo, 2004; Omi and Winant, 1994). Leonardo (2004), Sullivan (2006), Lopez (1994), Omi and Winant (1994), and Lipsitz (1998) argue that there should be a shift to an analysis that acknowledges the laws and policies that created the privileges, leading to racial domination.

When Whites fail to acknowledge the systemic impact of race privilege, they believe that their singular acts relieve them of culpability. They are surely not guilty for those racist problems over there. Further, they fail to own their complicity as beneficiaries of the racist practices. Whites also hide behind the argument that they had nothing to do with slavery and that it was a long time ago. Leonardo (2004), in contrast, argues that "despite the fact that racial domination proceeds us, Whites daily recreate it on both the individual and institution level. He adds further, that contrary to popular belief, white supremacy is an equal opportunity offender, and it not solely perpetuated by hate groups or those who are unapologetically white supremacists. Leonardo (2004) asserts, "it is not solely the domain of white supremacist groups. It's rather the domain of average, tolerant people, of lovers of diversity, and of believers in justice," (p. 270) who are guilty of perpetuating racial domination.

Research focused on white privilege prevents a more in-depth study of structural racism. This racism is best understood as white supremacy as a means of racial domination. From job discrimination to red lining to genocidal efforts against Native Americans, white supremacy is more than just privileges; it is systemic and structural ways of upholding white racial domination

(Leonardo, 2004). Leonardo's (2004) article calls into question the American ideal of meritocracy, especially when so much of the privilege that Whites enjoy is unearned.

Individual vs group identity. Part of moving beyond a white privilege analysis towards one that includes white supremacy involves shifting from individual to group identity (Leonardo, 2004; Sullivan, 2006; Anders, Bryan, and Noblit, 2005). Keeping the analysis of whiteness nestled in the discourse of privilege centers the advantages of Whites and erases the victims of subordination: people of color. Further, this level of analysis keeps the conversation focused on individual meanness rather than collective power. Looking at the ways in which whiteness functions for White people, as a group, fosters a structural analysis of white supremacy. A structural analysis is necessary because there are legitimate barriers that prevent access for so many.

Bonilla-Silva (1997) further reiterates this point as he posits that most analytical work around race and racism focuses too much on racism as an individual ideology. He believes that a structural framework is missing, and that in order to fully understand how racism manifests itself in society, a "sound theoretical apparatus" must exist (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 465). Bonilla-Silva (1997) believes that with a structural view of racism, a racialization framework explains racism as dynamic and can be represented through both overt and covert means.

Whiteness Reified Through Law and Policy

The supremacy of whiteness has traditionally been reified through laws and policies. Ironically, the judicial and legislatives systems are also the means through which people of color have fought for equality. As such, the court systems have been used both to reinforce a racial hierarchy and to dismantle one, if only in name. Using the judicial system to pursue equality for people of color has been a double-edged sword. Fights for equality, however, according to

critical legal scholar Derrick Bell (1991) are futile because Blacks will never achieve it. Battles seemingly won somehow do not always position people of color as the greatest beneficiaries of said laws or policies. For example, Bell (1980) helps us to rethink our framing of the landmark decision of *the Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case.

Bell (1980) proclaims that the victory in *Brown* (1954) was more an issue of interest convergence than a genuine concern for equality in education for Black children. Interest convergence, as defined by Bell (1980), "The interest of [B]lacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of [W]hites" (p. 523). In other words, racial progress for Blacks will occur if and only if there is a benefit to maintaining the hierarchy whiteness. Bell (1980) explains that it was advantageous for White America to grant school desegregation because at the time, America needed to persuade people in third world countries to side with the United States as we were in battle with Communist countries, to convince Black soldiers who fought in World War II that it was possible to enjoy freedoms in their own country, and lastly to increase the economic growth potential of the South. Further, stories of those families and communities impacted by the decision to desegregate are often silenced during the victory celebrations of what *Brown* (1954) had to offer.

Without these stories, especially those of Black women, we are left with the majority narrative of superior White schools and inferior Black schools (Mungo, 2013; Brown, 2016; Van and Noblit, 1993). Contrary to the common narratives about all-Black schools prior to desegregation, the overwhelming feeling of most students was not one of inferiority or deficiency (Brown, 2016; Dempsey and Noblit, 1993; Hughes and Swain, 2015; Patterson, 2015). The Black participant stories serve as counternarratives because their voices and experiences are centralized (Brown, 2016; Mungo, 2013; Patterson et al., 2010). Major themes

emerge from their stories such as the ethic of care, family-like atmosphere, nurturing teachers, Black pride and empowerment, validation, and a sense of loss accompanying school desegregation (i.e. Black culture, mascots, teachers, community, etc.) (Brown, 2016; Dempsey and Noblit, 1993; Hughes and Swain, 2015; Patterson, 2015; Shircliffe, 2001; Walker, 2015). These intersecting themes create complex, multi-faceted stories about pre-and post-desegregation. While desegregation was supposed to be a victory for communities of color, it also brought about the destruction of communities of color where Blacks thrived through underfunded, yet supportive familial connections. Other moments of seemingly racial progress also served to reify white dominance.

Thompson Dorsey and Chambers (2014) argue Whites use the judicial system and affirmative action policies to reassert white supremacy. Looking at laws and policies that were created on behalf of a class people who were traditionally denied access due to discrimination, White plaintiffs have sued different institutions of higher education because they were not admitted (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). In their article titled, *Growing CDR (Cedar): Working the Intersections of Interest Convergence and Whiteness as Property in the Affirmative Action Legal Debate* (2014), Thompson Dorsey and Chambers pull from Bell's (1980) interest convergence and Harris' (1993) whiteness as property to describe a cycle of convergence-divergence-reclamation (C-D-R). This cycle helps us to better understand one of the ways in which whiteness is reified. First, there has to be a moment where the needs of Blacks overlaps with a vested interest of whites, where fulfilling the need converges with a benefit for white people (Bell, 1980; Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). As Blacks are able to make progress because of the provision, Whites no longer focus on how the law or policy

benefits them but focus on Blacks now having something that they coveted as their own (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). At this point, interests begin to diverge.

As the impact of affirmative action policies began to show positive effects for Blacks—increased college attendance, employment, and enrollment in graduate programs—Whites became possessive of those spaces and began to push back (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). One of the ways this pushback manifested itself was through individuals, such as Marco DeFunis (*DeFunis et al. v. Odegaard et al.,* 1974) Allan Bakke (*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke,* 1978), Cheryl Hopwood (although she was joined by others) (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996) and Abigail Fisher (*Fisher v. University of Texas at* Austin, 2013) who, in essence, argued that they were denied admission to higher educational programs because underqualified minorities took their spot, or a spot that they did not deserve (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014).

According to Thompson Dorsey and Chambers (2014), this portion of the CDR cycle is related to imperialistic reclamation. Not only did these White plaintiffs believe that they owned a seat at the proverbial table, some of them sued the universities for punitive damages as if their *property* was damaged (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). While not all of the plaintiffs were successful in arguing their cases of discrimination, they have effectively etched in public discourse the idea of reverse discrimination and the pervasiveness of white supremacy (Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014; Crenshaw, 1988).

Whiteness Studies in Education

More often than not in the education discipline, studies of whiteness focus on educator racial identities and the way in which they embody those identities. The educational profession is largely White, 80%, and largely women, 77% (Taie and Goldring, 2017). As such, White

women, rather than White men, are the main participants in most studies. These studies, often using a qualitative approach, focus on discursive practices, white racial identity, and pedagogical practices (Leonardo, 2004; Hytten and Warren, 2008; Hughes, 2008). Further, pre-service educational programs are becoming a focal point of study, as more and more schools of education are critically thinking about educator preparation for diverse classrooms. For example, researchers Hytten and Warren (2008) studied pre-service teachers in course designed to teach students about the structural power associated with whiteness. The Education and Culture class was comprised of fifteen graduate students, with all but two identifying as White (Hytten and Warren, 2008). From their study, four discursive patterns emerged which serve to perpetuate white supremacy and secure racial dominance: "Appeals to self, Appeals to Progress, Appeals to Authenticity, and Appeals to Extremes" (Hytten and Warren, 2008, p. 70). Each pattern included several, more specific rhetorical themes.

Regarding Appeals to self, for example, Hytten and Warren (2008) found that students employed discourse of connections, discourse of self-absorption, and discourse of friends and family. Class discussion and written student reflections revealed that when talking about whiteness, White students would narrate stories of discrimination, often resulting in a false equivalency. Examples of being mistreated or stereotyped for being blonde, overweight, or being a part of a fraternity (Hytten and Warren, 2008). Or, in another example, White students would center themselves as victims. Sue, a student in the class, lamented, "Does feeling that my whiteness is a normal condition condemn me to the rans of a racist?" (pf. 73). "Shall I feel guilty," Sue continued, "or as if there is something wrong with me, just for feeling normal?" (p. 73). Hytten and Warren (2008) argue that while guilt is a starting place, the unfortunate downside is that it immobilizes rather than empowers students to disrupt the status quo. Many of

the discursive patterns that emerged overlap with patterns Bonilla-Silva (2014) found during his studies. These are further explained later.

In *Seeing the Strange in the Familiar: Unpacking Racialized Practices in Early Childhood Settings* (Brown, Souto-Manning, and Tropp Laman, 2010), researchers study common, unexamined practices in elementary schools and reveal practices that contribute to racially inequitable environments for students of color and those living in poverty. Using Critical Race Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, researchers studied the discursive patterns within and across three different contexts: a school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fundraising activity, an Accelerated Reader (AR) program, and a read aloud classroom activity. By critically studying the language used in each of these three contexts, whether by parents, students, or teachers, the researchers found that minority students were aware of how their identities were shaped and impacted by the social practices of the three different contexts.

The researchers used qualitative case studies for the three different contexts. Data were collected through observations, transcripts, and interviews. To analyze the data, researchers looked for discursive patterns and themes related to racism and segregation. For example, regarding the PTA fundraiser, researchers found that class practices were embedded in school fundraising. For example, students were gathered in a cafeteria and a White female representing the company exclaimed that "The best students will earn prizes like this robot" and "Good students will help the school by selling the chocolate candies" (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 517). This language implied that "bad" students would not earn prizes or sell candy. Tyrone, a black student, was in tears on the day that the money for the fundraiser was due. When one of the researchers inquired, he lamented that he was "no good" because he did not sell candy like he was "supposed to" (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 357). Another family shared that they spent $60

buying stuff, even though they didn't have it, because their daughter really wanted the accompanying prize. Upon reflection, the researcher noted how classism and racism were inherent in the fundraising practices.

The researchers concluded that it is necessary to become aware of the hidden messaging of common, everyday practices in the school setting. They added that

> ignoring the historically hidden messages that are sent to children and that children send us only perpetuates the practices that demean and disenfranchise families, schools, and communities where the privileged few remain in a powerful state oppressing and silencing the others. When this happens, racism and social positioning are allowed to continue and go unquestioned. Racial understanding in the classroom is one small step toward moving beyond pronounced neutrality to disrupting commonplace practices and perplexing the familiar (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 530).

Whether or not the parents and educators had positive intentions with their fundraiser, they were still enacting whiteness values.

One of the ways in which educators of pre-service teachers engage teachers in reflections of their racial identity is through writing narratives. In *Revisiting the Back Jesus: Re-emplotting a Narrative Through Multiple Retellings* (McVee, 2005), the researcher studies a White female teacher's retelling of a particular story involving her first encounter at a predominately Black Catholic school. As a student in the researcher's class, the teacher shared her narrative, as a part of a class assignment, six different times, both orally and written. As the teacher retold the story, her attempts to re-emplot the narrative revealed that the story changed each time (McVee, 2005). The researcher, using theoretical perspectives related to narratives and White teachers, particularly White middle class female teachers, makes a case for how Ellie, the teacher in the study, uses varying discursive maneuvers to tell and re-tell a story that involves not only her racial identity, but also the racial identity of the school setting.

Using Labov's (2008) narrative structure, McVee (2005) found that the changes within Ellie's narrative demonstrated re-emplotment. Each retelling revealed that Ellie's understanding of and position within the story changed. She shifted her gaze from the racialized other to the whiteness of her own identity. Rather than being solely focused on her view of the school community, she evolved to wondering how others perceived her in the setting.

McVee (2005) makes the case for using narratives as an educative tool for teachers, particularly dealing with race issues. It is not the narrative itself that is helpful, but the reflexive and analytical opportunities created through examinations that could prove to be beneficial in helping teachers think more critically about their racial identities and those of the communities in which they will work.

Whiteness Studies in Psychology and Sociology

> *In passing, it should be noted that theorists and researchers have viewed similar symptoms (e.g. racial denial, self-hate, feelings of inferiority, etc.) as a cause for alarm and serious psychological intervention in Black communities. However, it does not seem that similar enthusiasm has been expended in promoting healthy White racial identity development* (Helms, 1997, pgs. 50 and 53).

As Helms (1997) alluded to above, people do not have a sense of urgency when it comes to recognizing the need for whites to have a positive racial identity association. It is more common to focus on this need in Black communities. In psychology, studies of identity development involve stages. Helms (1997) addresses the topic of racial identity development as a series of stages, where a person progresses from one stage to the next. Looking at both black and white identity measures, presumably one moves from negative beliefs to positive ones. This is a form of operationalized racial identity development. Stages help to better assess patients' place

of development so that counseling efforts are more targeted. Some may argue that racial identity development as less linear. Helms (1997) and Burkhard, Juarez-Huffaker, and Ajmere (2003) discuss this, too, as they acknowledge that identity is fluid, and it changes over time.

Several scholars have developed stages for racial identity development; however, Helms' (1997) is most known. The stage model for White racial identity consists of two phases. Phase I, contains the Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration stages (Helms, 1997). The Contact stage is characterized by Whites beginning to notice Black people as racialized beings. In this stage, Whites have minimal contact with Black people, but when they do, Whites will use the Black person to teach them about Black culture (Helms, 1997). The two stages of Phase II, where a positive White identity begins to take form, are the Pseudo-Independent, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy stages (Helms, 1997). At the point of Autonomy, Whites no longer hold animus toward another group based on skin color. They are also able to understand both ideological and systemic racism, and actively pursues ways in which to challenge racial oppression (Helms, 1997).

With a sociological perspective, scholar Bonilla-Silva (2014) seeks to understand the ways in which racism manifests throughout society. He argues that the current colorblind movement, one in which some people argue that they do not see race and where many Americans believe that we are now in a post-racial time period, highlights the need for work to be done to address racism because empirical data proves otherwise (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Many educational disparities regarding graduation rates, access to advanced classes, suspension rates, higher education attainment, etc. are disparate along racial lines (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Rhetorical racial patterns or "race talk" are patterns of language individuals use to communicate their beliefs regarding racial matters (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 101). Bonilla-Silva

(2014) notes that White adults, when interviewed about racial matters, utilized several rhetorical patterns to evade directly expressing their racial views. He organized Whites' race talk into three main categories: 1) avoidance, 2) semantic moves, and 3) projection. Projection is used to allow one to shift blame onto someone else, allowing that person to escape guilt and culpability. For example, when asked about governmental programs for Blacks used to address the effects of discrimination, multiple White participants in Bonilla-Silva's (2014) study provided answers such as, "They [Blacks] self-segregate" or "They take advantage of the welfare system" (p. 114). These participants made it clear that Blacks created their own problems, not Whites (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). While the aforementioned studies involve understanding race, racism and whiteness among adults, it is imperative the researchers spend more time studying children.

White Seeds: Studies of Race and White Children

Racism is endemic to and systemic in American society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1988). Racist ideologies are passed down from generation to generation through family, media, legal systems, educational systems, etc., and these beliefs are present in the educational environment (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Rarely, though, do researchers focus on the ways in which white youth perpetuate racial biases in educational settings (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Many studies on the role of race and racism are dated and focus on the negative impacts on people of color, ranging from youth to adults (Pope-Davis and Ottavi, 1994).

Salvatore and Shelton (2007) find that ambiguous prejudice, racism that is hard to detect, negatively impacts people of color's cognitive abilities. However, when it comes to studying racial identity and the impact of racism, white youth are largely absent. Thandeka (1999) writes, "The first racial victim of the white community is its own child" (p. viii). Similar to other victims of abuse, white youth project abuse, and people of color are the recipients. As such, it is

necessary to gain an understanding of how White youth understand their racial identities. This work is important because racism has negative health, economic, educational, social, and political outcomes, not only for people of color but also for whites as well (Thandeka, 1999; Wing Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera, 2009).

Current educational research primarily focuses on diversity, culturally relevant pedagogy, or multicultural education (Rogers and Mosley, 2006) but not racism or racial biases. When studies are conducted, this literature almost always omits White culture as one of the cultures to study. Nieto (2003) calls racism a "problem that must be confronted in research, in classroom practice," and researchers and educators play vital roles in addressing it (p. 205). Additionally, diversity and multicultural education usually does not involve an examination of White youth's investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 1998). Lipsitz (1998) and Harris (1993) argue that an investment in whiteness allows whiteness to function like a property, something in which to invest, something that holds value and power, something that allows one the right to exclude, and give one access to spaces and places.

Recognition of racial difference in infancy. As an anti-racist educator, I often hear the cliché, "Children do not see color." I infer this statement to mean that children do not recognize the differences in skin color. They use the belief to fuel their resistance to talking with children about race and racism. Recent literature, however, shows that babies recognize phenotypical differences. As early as three months, infants show a preference for their own race (Njoroge, Benton, Lewis, and Njoroge, 2009; Sangrigoli and De Schonen, 2004; Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Gibson, Smith, Ge, and Pascalis, 2005). Researchers use photos of people of the same race and people who are not through a process of habituation. Habituation occurred when the child demonstrated an awareness of a particular photo, making it less novel (Njoroge et al., 2009;

Sangrigoli and De Schonen, 2004; Kelly et al., 2005). Researchers would habituate an infant to a photo of someone of their own race, and then show them a picture of someone from a different race. Infants would look longer at the same race photo, demonstrating no preference for the novel face. Kelly et al. (2005) noted that this preference was not evident in newborns but for three-month-olds, noting that the preference was learned and not innate. Further, Sangrigoli and De Schonen (2004) found that it was possible, though in the short them, to habituate infants to other-race faces and reduce the own-race bias. All in all, race recognition is a learned behavior through environmental influences and research shows that this recognition begins in infancy. As such, children do see color.

Discourses of whiteness. White children, like adults, use language to reify and resist whiteness. Several studies show that White children explicitly and implicitly communicate their understanding of race and the racial other (Miller, 2015; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Rogers and Mosley, 2006; Park, 2011). Using critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework allowed the researchers to situate children's' discursive habits within systems of power and oppression. For example, Miller (2015) studied her three White children, seeking to better understand how dominant discourses impacted their racial identity. She observed her children, ages 6, 7, and 10, in multiple settings for nine months. Miller (2015) learned that discourses of whiteness were represented "literally, *everywhere*" (p. 31)—on television shows, pieces of mail, in song lyrics, flyers, etc., in addition to being a part of family conversations. In one incident, Miller (2015) recounted her 6-year old son, Max, inquiring of a nurse, "'Hey, Man, why are you Black all over?" (p. 31). Max racialized the nurse as *other*, or not the norm, because he did not question his White nurses in the same manner.

Rogers and Mosley (2006) conducted a study in a second-grade classroom where they analyzed race and whiteness using children's books. They used a literacy approach to engage White students in conversations about race. The study took place in a predominately White classroom in St. Louis, Missouri. The researchers examined how two groups of White students elicited white talk (McIntyre, 1997), or talk that White people use to shield them from discussing race and recognizing their own whiteness, during guided reading. Three key themes emerged from their study related to how the White children navigate talking about race. They characterized their themes as "moves" and described them as "noticing whiteness, enacting white privilege, and transforming whiteness into liberatory alliances" (p. 483). While reading *The Bus Ride* (Miller, 1998), for example, one student noticed a contrast between the text and one of the pictures in the book. The book, about bus boycotts, featured a Black character named Sara, who protested the bus laws. The student, Sandra, was confused by the text stating that "'many [W]hite people and [B]lack people came up to shake [Sara's] hand,'" showing their support of her. Sandra was confused because Whites were not shown in the illustrations accompanying the text. In this instance, Rogers and Mosely (2006) noted that the presence of race, though limited in the text, helped students develop their race consciousness. The researchers concluded that students were constructing, enacting, and challenging whiteness in one sitting, which challenged ideas of linear stage development (Rogers and Mosely, 2006).

The First R. *The First R* (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001) is transformational text documenting a study of young children in a pre-kindergarten school. Researchers, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) challenge adults to check our *adult-centered* views and assumptions of race and racism when thinking about how children learn about and understand these constructs. It's easy to project our own thoughts and opinions, so we have to be conscious of this as researchers

who desire to focus on young people. Researchers should be more inclined to study children in the least adult- centered method (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). The concept of studying children in their *natural settings* will yield more authentic understanding of how they view, enact, and construct their racial identities.

Van Ausdale and Feagin(2001) clearly problematize Piaget's theory of cognitive development and the ways in which it has historically limited our understanding of how children develop their racial identities. Like Morrison and Thandeka, Vygotsky's theories support the idea of *becoming* racial beings (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Vygotsky helps us to move away from the set stages of child development Piaget created. In some ways, Piaget's stages work for child development, but in others ways, they do not, especially when it comes to thinking about our social selves.

Within the study, children of color wield agency by standing up for themselves. In one upsetting story involved Mike (Black) and Brittany (White), where Brittany said that Mike could not have a white rabbit at his house because he was Black (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). Brittany was adamant and relentless about arguing her position. She smiled when Debi, the researcher, informed her that she had made Mike really upset. Debi even commented that normally Mike was a self-assured child, but this episode with Brittany drove him to tears. It was such a deep, symbolic scene. Harris' (1993) whiteness as property comes to mind and the ways in which it can manifest in young kids. Brittany clearly established that the ability to own something that was white was the sole right of Whites.

Looking at both children and their roles in this encounter are important. While Mike was the clear victim in this story, there is so much to be said about Brittany. Based on the description, Brittany was not moved to have empathy at the thought of harming Mike nor at the

sight of his tears. This distancing from the ability to connect with humanity, with emotions, could be directly related to Thandeka's (1999) work. During the process of becoming White, Thandeka (1999) talks about having *fenced in feelings* and limited access to a full range of emotions, which thus causes harm to White children. If we think about cycles of abuse, hurt people hurt people. Assuming that Brittany has already been *harmed* by whiteness, her actions make sense. Brittany was only 4, and she wielded whiteness like a pro. Brittany gives us cause to think about ways to arm White kids against whiteness.

The White identity role in youth can be observed through rhetorical racial patterns which can be assessed using a racial bias instrument, and in turn reflect an individual's White identity role. Identity is a role that people perform. In society, people talk about gender roles, parent roles, student roles, but rarely does society address racial roles (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). White identity role in youth functions as a pattern of behaviors, similar to that of adults. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) describe racial identity roles as the interplay of "concepts, discourse, identity, and role performance or action" (p 36). For White identity role in youth, specifically, they argue that White children are actively observing, learning, and processing the language and behaviors associated with performing whiteness in society (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). This performance is enacted through behaviors and the use of language.

Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) research confirms that such patterns, noted previously by Bonilla-Silva (2014), also exist in pre-school aged children. For example, while completing a study at a pre-school, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) found that students used racial language to exert power, power to exclude, to assert White status, and to wound others. Unlike the adults in Bonilla-Silva's (2014) study, the children in Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) were much more overt with their race talk. For example, Carla, a White three-year-old, quipped, "Because I can't

sleep next to a nigger," when asked by the teacher why she moved her cot away from a Black female classmate (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001, p. 1). Rogers and Mosely's (2006) research confirms Van Ausdale and Feagin's (2001) findings that young children independently create and use racial language in appropriate contexts. It is important for researchers to further study how young White children navigate between overt and covert racism.

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) observed students in their natural setting. They believed that seeing students in their own environment prevented adults from projecting their views of race—or their views of how they think children think about race—onto children. Research shows that children as young as three to four-years-olds already recognize racial difference and begin to assign value to that difference (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2012; Kowalski and Lo, 2001). Brown Spatzier, and Tobin (2010) conducted a study on the inter-group attitudes of white children. For this study, the researchers examined how White, African-American, and Latino students, between the ages of 9 and 14, viewed their ethnic identity. The primary focus of the study was to analyze how white children, as the majority group, identified themselves, how they felt regarding their attitudes towards their identity label, and how they compared to other students in minority racial groups (Brown, Spatzier, and Tobin, 2010).

The researchers used several different measures to gather data from the participants. For example, one question used the multi-group ethnic identity measure (MEIM) to have students identify a self-label for their ethnicity (Brown, et al., 2010). Students also answered a series of two-part questions that helped to assess their ethnic identity. For example, students had to decide if they agreed with a sentence such as the following: "Some kids do *not like* being [ethnicity] BUT others kids *like* being [ethnicity]" (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 763). The child's chosen ethnicity label would be inserted.

There were three major findings from the study. For one, of the 120 White participants, they named 36 different ethnic identities (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 763). School context played a role with this labeling. White students who attended majority White schools were more likely to choose White as their identity. White students who attended more diverse schools were less likely to identity as White, choosing to add a minority identifier such as Italian-American (Brown, et. al, 2010, p. 763).

Second, students who identified as White or American (seen as synonymous) held less positive views of their ethnic identity than students who identified with a minority identity (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 763). The researchers noted that from the minority student perspectives, this is significant because it would be more important for students who identify as minorities to have a more positive view of themselves (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 763).

Third, all students were more positive about their ethnic in-group attitudes than out-group; however, students who identified as White were not as positive about out-groups in comparison to other White children (Brown, et al., 2010, p. 763). Researchers noted that this finding aligns with previous research regarding America's structural racism which privileges whiteness over other ethnicities.

Conclusion to Chapter 2

In conclusion, it is imperative that educational researchers continue to better understand the ways in which whiteness is perpetuated in our society, our educational system, and through children. Dismantling race-based systemic inequality can be achieved as the presence of whiteness is made visible. Using what we learned from these studies will help further the work of anti-racist educators who seek a more racially justice society.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how White children construct and understand their racial identity. Understanding racial identity development in White youth is important because often researchers ignore this age group. In studies focused on whiteness, adults are the normative subjects of interest, omitting a focus on White children that makes their role as purveyors of whiteness invisible. They may be causing harm to other children, knowingly or unknowingly. Further, several studies reveal that White children actively and passively participate in discourses of whiteness (Miller, 2015; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Rogers and Mosley, 2006; Park, 2011). This discourse can communicate beliefs that affirm Whites as superior and people of color as inferior. Salvatore and Shelton (2007) found that ambiguous prejudice—racism that is hard to detect—negatively impacts people of color's cognitive abilities. If racism at this level is not addressed, children of color will continuously be victims, preventing them from opportunities to heal, while negatively impacting their academic achievement (Salvatore and Shelton, 2007). Additionally, White children's connection to their humanity—the ability to experience a range of emotions including empathy and compassion for people of color—will be lessened and their perceptions of reality will be altered if we do not think critically about how they become White (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Thandeka,1999).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What does White racial identity construction look like for White children participating in an anti-racism summer camp?
2. How do White children normalize or resist whiteness?

Case Study

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted a case study of White children attending two, five-day anti-racism summer camps. "A case study," according to Yin (1994), "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). They are typically used when researchers want to observe, for example, lived experiences in a particular setting (Yin, 1994). Case study was the most appropriate method for this investigation because the purpose was to learn more about White children's racial identity construction through their participation in a particular camp.

My research questions aligned with those generally addressed through the case study method. Questions leading with *what* and *how* are exploratory and explanatory, respectively (Yin, 1994). Additionally, research questions that seek to understand natural experiences and nuanced relationships rather than explain correlation or cause and effect, are best answered through qualitative approaches (Stake, 1995). My questions aligned with the transformative paradigm of qualitative research design. They were open-ended, and they sought to address social justice issues (Creswell, 2012; Mertens, 2010). Data from the study will be used to further anti-racism work with young children and to advocate for systemic change through educational policy. I derived data in this study through my field notes gathered during participant observations, children's work samples, pictures of work samples, and parent surveys. I conducted a descriptive, single-case study with embedded units (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007;

Lichtman, 2013). To preserve the anonymity of participants, I used pseudonyms for them and the anti-racism program which sponsored the summer camp.

DPI, which stands for Disruptive Peacemaking Institute, hosted one camp for children in first through second grade and another for children in third through fifth grade. Children from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds participated. The cases, or units of study (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995), were the White students in the anti-racism camp. The phenomenon of interest was their racial identity construction. What made the study a single-case was the focus on multiple students in one context (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995). The purpose of a case study is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a particular situation, which directly correlates with the purpose of the current study (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995; Gall et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2013). As such, the research questions for this study were best answered using this method.

DPI Background

DPI Summer Camp is a signature program of the non-profit organization DPI. I am the co-founder and director of DPI. I started the organization in 2015 as a means to address racism in the U.S. DPI hopes to dismantle systemic racism in education and beyond by providing summer camps for children, workshops for parents, and professional development for educators. I specifically chose to do racial equity work with younger children because I believed that targeted anti-racism efforts must begin during the earlier years of learning. If students were developing biased beliefs about the race of others at young ages, then we should be intentional about leading anti-racism efforts during that same time.

One of DPI's signature programs is the ant-racism summer camp. DPI piloted the summer camp in 2016, hosting 15 children from diverse backgrounds. Seven campers identified as Black/African American, five as White, and three as multi-racial. The camp was geared

toward rising kindergarteners through rising second graders. We targeted White families and White spaces for our summer camp because research shows that they are least likely to have race-based conversations in their homes (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). However, our camps are for all children, regardless of racial or ethnic background. In 2017, we dropped kindergarten from the camp because we realized the curriculum did not fit that age group. We also scaled-up by offering a third through fifth grade camp. The curriculum for the camps was co-created by the DPI board members. Our board of ten is comprised of parents, educational doctoral students, former and current educators, and community activists. Two of our members are first generation U. S. citizens and learned English as a second language. Our educator expertise ranges from seven to thirty-plus years in the classroom, from pre-kindergarten to college.

We used a literacy-based framework for the camps. Each day aligned with a theme, and the planning team found age-appropriate books that concretely addressed the day's topics. For example, on Day 1 of the 1st-2nd grade camp, we focused on the importance of names. We read the book *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams and Mohammed, 2009), in which the protagonist, a refugee from Sudan, addressed American classmates and teachers who constantly mispronounced his name. Throughout the rest of the day, we engaged students in hands-on learning activities to help them think about their identity, including the significance of learning to pronounce other people's names correctly. xfEach child in the camp received a copy of the book read for the day. By the end of the week, they had a home library of five to seven books that explicitly addressed race, racism, or anti-racism.

The goals of the camp were to 1) foster healthy racial identities in children, 2) build a historical understanding of race and racism, and 3) equip families with tools and resources for extending anti-racist practices in the home and community. We used a co-teacher model, and I

was one of three facilitators for the pilot year and one of six for the current study. Parents choose to send their kids to our camps because they have a vested interest in raising anti-racist children, and they want help in knowing how to do this type of work effectively.

Research Context

I chose the study sample based on purposeful criterion sampling (Gall et al., 2007). Parents willingly registered their children to participate in a summer experience that would expose them to conversations and curricula about race and racism. Children are a vulnerable population, and conversations about race elicit such strong emotions that I had to be intentional about selecting a space that would allow me to study race and children in a way that minimized harm. The DPI Summer Camps met the special requirement of servicing children and families who are committed to learning about race. This space was an out-of-school learning environment. Traditional school settings would hinder studies such as mine from occurring due to the nature of the topic. For example, in a traditional classroom, some parents may not feel comfortable with their children learning about white supremacy and racism. This was not an issue for parents who intentionally signed up their kids up for DPI Summer Camp**.** There were two separate camps. One was for rising first through second graders, and the other was for rising third through fifth graders, referred to as Camp 1 and Camp 2, respectively, moving forward.

DPI hosted a Family Orientation event for all families participating in the camp. Close to seventy parents, guardians, and children attended the session. Pizza and free child care certainly impacted the turnout. The purpose of the orientation was to have a conversation with parents and guardians, ensuring that they understood the nature of the camp. At the orientation, families met the DPI planning team, along with the co-facilitators of the camp. We also shared an overview of a regular day (see Appendix 2) and held a question-and-answer parent panel

comprised of families who participated in the camp the previous summer. It was very important to be transparent with families. I communicated that while we have a camp song, our camp was not a kumbaya camp. Their children would be engaged in tough conversations related to race, racism, and White supremacy. I hoped to assuage parent apprehensions by sharing that all of the co-facilitators were previously educators, except for one. That one facilitator, Ms. Lupita, was a licensed professional counselor who had a Masters in Special Education in School and Mental Health Counseling.

I introduced the study to parents at the orientation. I made it clear that I was shifting from my director role to a researcher role. I gave parents an overview of the study, and I told them that participation in the study was completely voluntary and was not a requirement for attending the camp. At Orientation, I informed parents that they had time to think about whether or not they wanted to participate in the study and that consent forms would be sent home in their child's daily folder.

I reached out to all parents and guardians, through email, as a reminder to those who attended Orientation and as an introduction to the ones who did not, asking whether they were willing to participate and if they were willing to allow their child or children to participate in the study. I asked all parents, regardless of racial or ethnic background, to sign a consent form because even though my focus was White children, the other children were present and played a role in the study. Using criterion sampling, I reviewed the demographic data parents provided through registration to determine which students identified as White.

Fifty-two children attended the two camps. Twenty participated in Camp 1 and thirty-two in Camp 2. On the registration form, parents selected the racial identity of their child. In the younger camp, nine children were identified as African American or Black, five identified as

White, one as Hispanic or Latino, and five as Bi-racial or Multiracial. Phenotypically, two of the Bi-racial children pass as White. One of the two parents noted this on the registration form. Passing as White means that society perceives the person as White due to physical features, such as skin color and hair texture.

For Camp 2, twenty children were identified as African American or Black, four as White, four as Hispanic or Latino, one as Asian, and three as Bi-Racial or Multiracial. Two of the Bi-racial students self-identified during camp as White-passing. After the study was completed, all parents and guardians received an electronic copy of the study findings. Participants with follow-up questions, could email me to address any and all concerns. Families did not receive compensation for participating in the study.

Of the fifty-two children who attended the camps, thirty-nine returned consent forms. Twenty identified as Black or African American, eight as White, eight Bi-racial or Multi-racial, two Hispanic or Latino and one Asian. Comments of children who did not return a consent form were not included in the field notes and their involvement with the camp was not a part of the data used for this study.

Data from the pre-survey DPI administered to parents offered more insight into the families attending the camp. Forty-one families participated in the camp. This number is lower than the total number of students because there were several sets of siblings represented in the camp. Out of the thirty-six parents who completed the survey, roughly 16% responded that they had *rarely* or *not at all* had race-based conversations in their homes prior to participating in the camp, 34% noted they *sometimes* had conversations, and 50% selected *often*. Table 3.1 demonstrates responses based on the overall racial breakdown of the survey participants. Thirty-three percent of White parents, which comprised 26% of respondents, noted that they *often*

talked about race. In contrast, 47%, almost half, of parents of Black or African American children said they talked about race *often*. Table 3.2 represents the demographic breakdown of the frequency of race-based conversations. Please note that parents of Bi-racial or Multi-racial children talked about race most frequently.

Table 3.1 Demographic breakdown of pre-survey participants

Question: What is the student's race or ethnicity?	**Percent of total respondents**
Black or African America	48%
Hispanic or Latino	6%
White	26%
Bi-racial or Multi-racial	20%

Table 3.2 Demographic breakdown of frequency of race-based conversations

Question: Before participating in the DPI Summer Camp, how often have you had race-based conversations with your child or children?	**Not at all**	**Rarely**	**Sometimes**	**Often**
Black or African America	6%	6%	29%	47%
Hispanic or Latino	50%	0%	0%	50%
White	0%	22%	33%	33%
Bi-racial or Multi-racial 7	0%	0%	43%	57%

Building trust and creating community. One of the ways I built trust among the participants was, first, explaining that I was the director of the camp, and that I was also a

student like them. I informed everyone on day one of each camp that I was studying them to better understand children and race. I let them know that I would be writing a "huge paper" after the study was over. I had to navigate this conversation in a way that was not too overwhelming or confusing for the children. Another way I built trust was through participating in an ice breaker called *Shabooya Roll Call*. Ms. Lupita explained the get-to-know-you activity. In order to participate, someone had to jump in the middle of the circle and engage in a call and response conversation with the outer circle. I modeled the first example for students:

Shabooya Sha Sha Shabooya Roll Call (2x)

My Name is Ronda (yeah)

I work with kids (yeah)

We gone have fun (yeah)

Cuz we're number one

Shabooya Sha Sha Shabooya Roll Call (2x)

Everyone was gathered in a circle, and we took turns introducing ourselves by popping and in out of the circle. We revisited Shabooya Roll Call throughout the week of each camp to break-up sitting periods, energize the group, and to continuously create a community where we knew one another's names.

The study took place at a summer camp where building community was a requirement. This context made it easier for me to exist as an *insider* (Stake, 1995), rather than as solely a researcher. Relationships are a key component to mitigating racial bias and building trust (Parsona & Turner, 2014; Noddings, 1992). Together, we created Community Beliefs. Ms. Lupita posed the following questions to the campers in Camp 1, while Ms. Heather, another facilitator, recorded the responses (see Figure 3.1): 1. How can we create a healthy community?

2. Who are we? 3. Who do we want to become as a group? 4. How do we need and want to treat one another in order to get there? This activity was repeated for Camp 2.

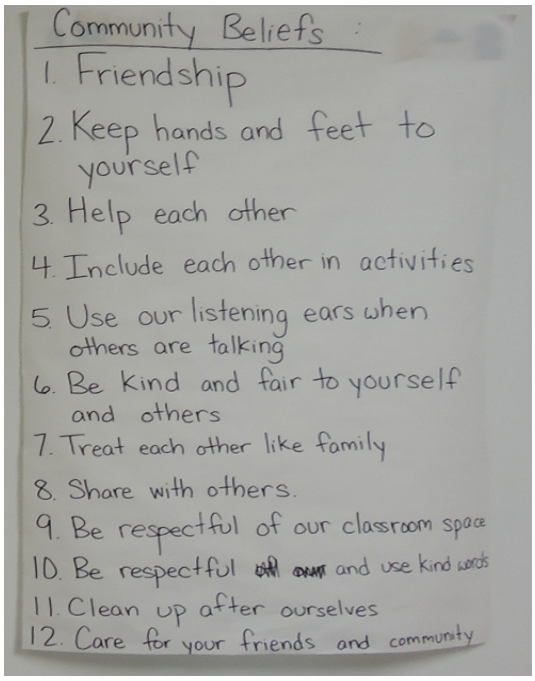


Figure 3.1 Community Beliefs

Primary participants. There were fifteen different students named in the study. I consider eight as primary participants due to their involvement in the experiences I analyzed in the data. I used observations of them over the course of the five days, notes, work samples, and pictures of work samples taken at camp to generate brief descriptions. I pulled their grade level and age from the registration forms parents completed. Claire, Madison, Molly, and Chloe attended Camp 1. Emily, Jamie, Frida, and Mike attended Camp 2.

Claire. Claire is an outspoken, White, six-year-old girl. She knew how to advocate for herself during disputes on the playground or during group discussions. Claire loved to participate and share stories during reading time. Talking about racism made her uncomfortable,

though. I often observed Claire with her arms folded or with her head down, appearing disinterested.

Madison. The word *fiery* comes to mind when I think of Madison. She was always ready to interject her opinions. As a White six-year-old, she exuded confidence. Madison and Claire latched onto each other over the course of the week. They were often together in in class and on the playground. They did not previously know each other.

Molly. Molly, a White six-year-old child, did not speak much during the week of camp, but when she did, her comments were worth noting. She had a hard time adjusting throughout the week. Watching her interactions with Madison and Claire, I think it was hard for her to expand their duo into a trio.

Chloe. Chloe was wise beyond her years. Her calming, peace-filled spirit as a seven-year-old often tempered our conversations. She has a White mother and Latinx father but passes as White, according to her mother. Based on the stories she shared, her father's racist experiences have greatly impacted her worldview. She had such a strong understanding of racism and power.

Emily. *Self-aware* comes to mind when I think of Emily. She is ten-years-old and is White and Filipino. According to her, she passes as White. Emily came to the camp with a strong understanding of race. She educated the group on the difference between *race* and *racism*. Emily helped everyone understand that talking about race was not an example of racism.

Jamie. Jamie's slow, methodical speech demonstrated the thoughtfulness she put into every sentence. Jamie is an eight-year-old White and Filipino girl. She and Emily are sisters. Like Emily, Jamie was already aware of her own racial identity and could explain privileges she was afforded because of her skin color.

Frida. Frida is already a feminist. As a ten-year-old White girl, she is an advocate for women's rights, as well as rights for Blacks. Frida once explained to the group the pay gap between White people and people of color. She, like many of the White participants, exuded self-confidence.

Mike. Mike is a pensive child. He rarely spoke in the large sessions, but his facial expressions and body language demonstrated that he was paying attention. Mike was not in my small group, so his participation may have increased in a different setting. However, when encouraged to speak, he shared a few noteworthy comments. He is a White nine-year-old boy.

Secondary participants. There were six co-facilitators, including myself, between the two camps. I consider them secondary participants. The facilitators signed an adult consent form and a confidentiality agreement. They were not a part of the research team and were hired on behalf of DPI to fulfill camp counselor duties. Two of the co-facilitators, Ms. Nakia and Ms. Okoye, were not mentioned in the study but were included here to provide a better understanding of all of the facilitators that were present. Below I provide brief descriptions of the co-facilitators and how I came to know them. Additional details regarding each participant are included throughout the findings and data analysis sections.

Ms. Lupita. Ms. Lupita is one of the planning team members for DPI and was present for the pilot summer camp program. She is a twenty-eight-year old Black woman. I met her during a statistics class the first year of our doctoral programs. Ms. Lupita is a third-year student in the School Psychology program. She has a master's degree in School and Mental Health Counseling. Ms. Lupita focuses on cultural sensitivity and promoting the social and emotional well-being of children and adolescents.

Ms. Heather. Ms. Heather is a first-year student in a Masters of Public Health Program. We attend the same university. She is a thirty-two-year old White woman, and I met her through a mutual acquaintance who recommended that we collaborate. Ms. Heather completed her summer practicum with DPI, serving as a co-facilitator and curriculum developer for the camps. She previously taught elementary school.

Ms. Nakia. Ms. Nakia is a local public school elementary teacher with five years of teaching experience. As a thirty-one-year old Black woman, she teaches at a predominately Black and Brown school and infuses racial justice in her curriculum. I learned about Ms. Nakia through her activism in fighting for both student and teacher rights.

Ms. Okoye. Ms. Okoye is a public-school elementary teacher with four years of teaching experience. She has a master's degree in Reading Education. Ms. Okoye is a twenty-seven-year old Black woman, and she also happens to be my sister-in-law.

Mr. Sam. Mr. Sam is a public-school educator at one of the local charter schools. He is a thirty-one-year-old White man with five years of teaching experience. Mr. Sam has a Masters of Educational Leadership, Politics, and Advocacy. One of the DPI planning members recommended Mr. Sam as a teacher for the summer camp.

Data Collection

I employed multiple qualitative research methods for data collection. This approach aided in triangulating the data (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). I used participant observation, field notes, photography of student work samples, student work samples, handouts and email communications to parents, and parent surveys to generate findings regarding the study participants. The combination of the participant observations and field notes generated the largest sources of data.

Participant observation. I engaged daily as a participant observer for this study. Lichtman (2012) notes this method allows researchers to shift between observer and participant throughout the study. I observed the children throughout the summer program and engaged with them in various activities such as playing games at recess and reading books during story time. Yin (2003) argues that participant observation allows researchers to engage in research as an insider and helps to produce a more authentic representation of the case. Observations occurred when I was not leading the lesson activities. Each of the co-facilitators volunteered to lead different parts of each lesson. Our roles changed throughout the day. For example, the person who typically led the morning meeting would also read the mentor or main text for the day (see Appendix B for an overview of the daily activities). This activity usually followed the morning meeting. The follow-up activity then would be led by a different facilitator. This cycle of engagement helped the children, co-facilitators, and I became a community during the week.

As a co-facilitator of the camps, I was present five days a week, for a total of ten days. The camp day ran from 7:45 AM until 3:00 PM. Thus, my time in the field lasted approximately seven hours a day. I spent roughly seventy hours between the two camps. Of those hours, I observed for about thirty hours.

Observation foci. The foci of the observations were student comments and student interactions. The combination of the two best helped me answer the research questions. The foci ensured that I narrowed my attention to variables and experiences that were related to the purpose of the study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). I listened for student comments, paid attention to student interactions, considered the content covered, and looked for seating arrangements during whole-group lessons. I also documented body language and seating arrangements. I recorded field notes in my binder for the camp.

As the camp director, I created a binder for each facilitator and placed copies of the daily lesson plans inside. Everyone's binder had their name on it. I wrote notes directly on my lesson plans so that I could know what the group was discussing when I noticed something that should be recorded. It was easier for me to keep up with one notebook than to have one for research and one as a facilitator. I kept my binder with me at all times because I needed to know the start time and end time of each activity. When I had to lead the lessons, I kept my notebook near me at the front of the room. Having our names on the binders ensured that our notebooks would not be mixed up. The other facilitators knew that I was collecting data and that my notebook contained confidential information. I took great care to ensure the contents of my notebook remained unknown. It was difficult for me to focus as a researcher, because I often found myself either being caught up in the moment of the discussion or thinking about how to redo the activity for improvement. In hindsight, juggling multiple hats ideally required more intentionality or conscious awareness dedicated to each role. After 3:00 p.m., co-facilitators would debrief our day. I also took notes during those sessions.

Additional data sources. In addition to observations and field notes, I used student work samples, and pictures of work samples to inform the study. Parents completed a registration form and pre- and post-surveys. The registration and surveys used in this study, minus a few adjustments, were re-used from the previous summer. Unfortunately, I did not create surveys specifically for this study. I reflect on this in Chapter 5. The data, nonetheless, was helpful to better understand the children and their families (see Appendices 3, 4, and 5 for registration and survey forms).

The camp used the registration form primarily to gather basic demographic information on the participants. One question of particular interest was, "Why would you like for your child

to participate in this camp?" While this question did not address one of the research questions, it did offer insight into the types of families supporting the children attending camp. The camp used the post-survey as an evaluation tool. Parents were asked a range of questions, for example "Before participating in the DPI Summer Camp, how often did you have race-based conversations with your child or children?" I analyzed the responses as another data point. The combination of data sources provided a fuller picture of the experiences of the children. While I used information from parent surveys, I was careful not to allow the parent voices to overshadow those of the students and their personal experiences.

Data Analysis

Experiential researchers, as Stake (1995) reminds us, differentiate ourselves from quantitative researchers in that we "have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists" (p. 37). It is key that we process data paying attention to context and details. As such, myriad ways exist for making meaning of data gathered using qualitative approaches (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Lichtman, 2013). Coffey and Atkinson (1996), in *Making Sense of Qualitative Data,* note that rigorous studies that seek to use interpretation to make sense of our society is what unifies these pathways. Their text helped me navigate the data analysis process which led to my study's findings. Anytime researchers apply meaning to participants' words or actions, though, we have to be careful because our interpretation of events may or may not align with what participants intended (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

I used qualitative methods of creating codes, themes, and categories (Gall et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2012; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Codes can be represented using words or phrases, and they inform how researchers generate themes across data points (Gall et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2012; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I synthesized across multiple data points, looking for patterns

and narratives. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recommend creating codes to describe certain phenomena and then moving towards categories or labels. This procedure helped to chunk data into meaningful sections. Researchers must be cautious, however, to not equate coding with data analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I linked codes to generate concepts from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Then I began to analyze and interpret what the coding process revealed.

Looking at my field notes, I used open coding and went line by line looking for ideas, patterns, and themes that stood out to me (see Table 3.3) (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I wrote down student comments as best I could. Some are exact and some are paraphrased. Paraphrased quotes are denoted through italics. Additionally, I reviewed aggregate survey data from parents, pictures, and student work samples, looking for what was both common and unique with the other data points (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I recorded any words or phrases from participants that stood out to me as I completed my first reading. Once I noticed an idea or concept had appeared a second time, I assigned it a code and a color. The data analysis process is recursive (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996); therefore, I read, re-read, and repeated this process until I felt I had exhausted the data.

Table 3.3 Excerpt from Coded Data

Theme: Processing Identity			
Category	***Codes***	I just wanted to say that almost all of my family is White, I think, but my cousin Jill and cousin Janet and Uncle June and Aunt Beth.	Madison, Camp 1, Day 3
		I've met my great-great-grandparents and my great-grandparents, and they're all White.	Claire, Camp 1, Day 2
Recognizing Whiteness	Seeing White	*Every day we talk about race. We've been talking about what White people have been doing to Black people. I'm White and I'm not doing these things. I don't want to be—*	Claire, Camp 1, Day 4

		Little White kids…my little sister, Jeanie, she has curly hair, and we do it. And they always stare at her hair…	Emily, Camp 2, Day 3
	Shame & Guilt	It's just going to make me feel bad about myself. It's going to make me feel guilty, and I don't want that.	Emily, Camp 2, Day 3
		Like that girl said in the video, sometimes you feel guilty for all of the privilege that you're given, even though you didn't earn it. Even though you know it's not your fault, you still feel guilty.	Frida, Camp 2, Day 3

I did not use analytical software, such as NVivo, to help generate codes. I preferred to go through the data independently, line by line, color-coding my notes. As a former high school English teacher who taught textual analysis, this process was one of the most enjoyable for me.

Application of frameworks. CRT, WhiteCrit, and CDA impacted how I analyzed the data. While I could have used *a priori* codes, codes created and then applied deductively to the data, I chose to use an inductive approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). I made this decision because epistemologically, I viewed the children I studied as possessors of knowledge (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, in an effort to center the students, I allowed what they offered to influence data analysis. However, the frameworks helped to keep the study centered on race, looking for the ways in which whiteness operated in connection to power and language.

Role of the Researcher

As an African American motherscholar (DePouw & Matias, 2016), I bring a racialized lens to the study. My earliest memory of a racial experience occurred at five years old in my kindergarten class, when a young White girl said, "You can't come to my birthday party because my dad said that Black people are not allowed in our home." The student was clearly instituting whiteness as property in exercising her power to exclude and deny my access to her family's space (Harris, 1993). Since then, the onslaught of racial micro-aggressions coupled with both

overt and covert racist experiences, have continued to pique my interest in learning how racism exits and persists as an ideology in its youngest perpetrators. I own that my racialized experiences in life will influence my data analysis. My practice of "conscious reflexivity" (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 54), where I name my positionality as impacting the study and where I offer critical reflections on conducting the study, demonstrate my commitment to creating a credible case study.

Trustworthiness

With any qualitative design, researchers take measures to ensure the high quality and rigor of the research study. I consulted Lincoln and Guba (1985) to address the trustworthiness of the current study. Trustworthiness, according to them, is the criteria upon which we judge a study's worth and quality. They posit that credibility is aligned with trustworthiness and offer several techniques to address the criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Regarding prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I spent at least seventy hours observing and interacting with the participants. This time afforded me the opportunity to be continuously engaged with the case and the phenomenon of interest. Additionally, I triangulated data through the multiple perspectives of students, used student work samples, pictures of work samples, data from parent surveys, and conducted peer debriefings.

Peer debriefing, according to Lincoln & Guba (1985), consists of allowing others to review and respond to the researcher's narratives and construction of data in a cyclical process. Informally, I would recount experiences from the camp to two of the co-facilitators, sharing my interpretations. They, in turn, offered feedback. I also presented de-identified field notes and my data analysis to the selected co-facilitators. Last, I shared my analysis with a researcher who is not affiliated with the study but who does racial equity work with children and families.

Transferability

Transferability relates to the researcher providing enough description such that readers are able to relate the content of the study across multiple contexts (Lincoln & Guba,1985). In order to address the transferability of the current study, I provided thick (Geertz, 2008), detailed descriptions of the context, including but not limited to the setting, events surrounding my observations from field notes, and student work samples. Geertz (2008) reminds us that our descriptions must offer details about concrete experiences.

Authenticity

Authenticity is determined by how well the study presented a balanced view of perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Researcher and participant voices were explicitly represented in the study. The claims I made were centered on the participants as the knowers, what they produced, said and experienced as the known (Noblit, 2004). I included my positionality and explained in detail how my perspectives and biases impacted my analysis of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1996).

For this qualitative research study, all of the quality criteria were addressed to enhance the rigor of the study. One main drawback in completing a case study is the lack of generalizability (Gall et al., 2010). However, as with most case studies, the purpose of the current study was not to generalize findings to a larger population (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). I solely wanted to investigate and describe how White children construct their racial identity, in a particular setting.

Ethics

After I successfully defended my dissertation proposal, I submitted an application to research human subjects to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approved the current

study after much scrutiny. The current study involved working with children who are considered a vulnerable population, and I was required to provide very specific details outlining how children's identities would be protected and how I was intentionally mitigating any risks that may arise. I took take great care to ensure that all participants remained anonymous and that their socio-emotional needs were met. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, and all data records were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office or on a password-protected external hard drive. Children will not be identified in any future report or publication of this study or its results. Additionally, one of the camp facilitators, as mentioned above, has a master's degree in School and Mental Health Counseling and was a third-year doctoral student in a School Psychology program. She helped mitigate the psychological risks for students.

DPI was prepared to handle students who became emotional or distressed while engaging with the curriculum and discussions of race, racism, and racial prejudice. Because DPI used co-facilitators, we were prepared to minimize this risk by addressing student needs through one-on-one conversations. Facilitators would step away from the group and work with a student to uncover whatever they were feeling. All parents were kept informed regarding the day's activities through daily notes home, emails, or phone calls.

Further, my dual role as the director of DPI and the researcher of this study presented a financial conflict of interest. DPI stands to benefit from this study. I submitted all necessary paperwork to the IRB revealing my relationship. Per IRB requirements, I will disclose in any public dissemination such as presentations, abstracts, posters, etc., my relationship with the organization DPI, which posits a financial conflict of interest.

Limitations

The current research study has limitations. First, I only observed the participants in one setting—the camps. The findings in this study could be enhanced through observing the children in multiple settings such as at home, in a traditional classroom setting, or in the community. However, participation in an anti-racism camp was something unique about this population that I wanted to specifically capture. Another limitation is related to establishing credibility. It is difficult to conduct member checks with young children. An alternative could have been sharing data and analysis with parents to seek their feedback, but I did not want the parent perspectives to undermine student voice and agency. Further, Aboud and Doyle (1996) found that parents and children's racial attitudes and beliefs about identity often do not align. To mitigate this threat to credibility, I conducted peer debriefings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) instead, with two educational researchers and one public health researcher.

Conclusion to Chapter 3

In conclusion, most research on race, racism, and racial identity is geared towards adults. While informative, it creates an invisibility of White children's racial identity and their roles as purveyors of whiteness. This also makes the experiences of Black children invisible, contributing to the trauma they experience. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) believe "If we are ever to know fully what race and racism mean in the larger society, we must understand what they mean to children" (p. 214). As such, it is imperative that researchers study the racial identity construction of White children. The results of this study will help further the work of anti-racist educators, parents, and policy makers who seek a more racially just society.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

I undertook this research study because I desired to know more about the ways White children construct whiteness, particularly those attending an anti-racism summer camp. This study has the potential to impact how White families raise their children, how educators teach, and how educational policymakers consider the role of race in their decision-making. The findings in this chapter answer my research questions: 1. What does racial identity construction look like for White children participating in an anti-racism summer camp? 2. How do White children normalize or resist whiteness? I used data gathered through participant observation, field notes, pictures of student work samples, surveys, and children's work samples to inductively create codes, themes, and categories (Gall et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2012; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

I have organized the data into three overarching categories related to whiteness: Recognizing, Reifying, and Resisting (see Figure 4.1). These categories are not mutually exclusive but are cyclical and overlapping. By this I mean that several incidences I labeled under *Recognizing* could also exist under *Reifying*. I used present progressive or "ing" verb endings because the identity construction process is ongoing and fluid (Cross, 2001; Thandeka, 1999; Morrison, 1992; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). We do not stay in positions of understanding indefinitely, especially not as children. In the following paragraph, I explain each of the three categories in an attempt to provide clarity and understanding.

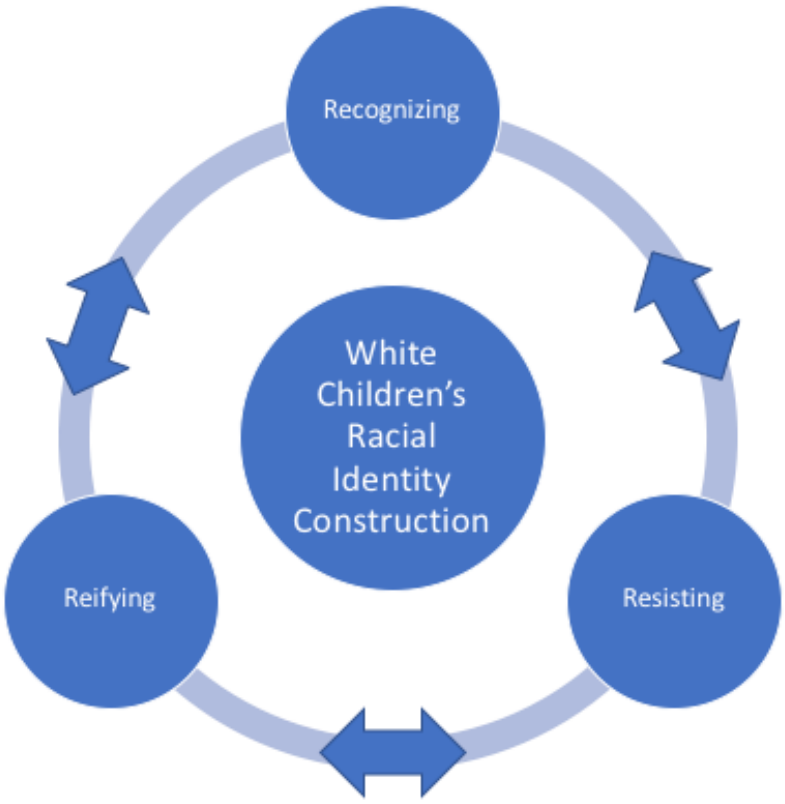


Figure 4.1 Model of White Children's Racial Identity Construction

Emerging Themes

White children are actively recognizing, reifying, and resisting whiteness. These were not stages of racial development (Helms, 1997; Cross, 2001) that the children were embodying, however. It was very possible for a child who demonstrated the ability to resist whiteness in one moment to reify it in another. What was most revealing, was that these abilities were present. Recognizing whiteness meant that White children could name either themselves or others as being White. It also meant that children could make connections among power, privilege, and identifying as White. Reifying whiteness emerged when students used their discourse to make whiteness present, either through inserting it into conversations or to detract from conversations. This maneuver was fascinating because they utilized it in a micro-aggressive way (Sue et al.,

2009). Consequently, these actions were not overtly racist. Last, resisting whiteness emerged as a counter to reification. This category literally and figuratively juxtaposed reifying whiteness. Analytically, it functioned as a counter category (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), but in practice, White children showed up in conversations using their narratives to challenge other White students who were exerting power in ways that upheld White supremacy. The incidences that I linked (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), generating the aforementioned themes and categories, are explained in more detail below.

Recognizing Whiteness

Seeing White. Most White American adults do not acknowledge or think about their race (Thandeka, 1999; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Lewis, 2004) as a part of their daily lives. In contrast, many of the White children came into the camps seeing and recognizing whiteness. Because the children were attending anti-racism summer camps, I figured they would be more aware than average White children. For example, on Day 2 of Camp 1 the children were gathered in a circle on the floor. Ms. Lupita, who is Black, was reading *All the Colors We Are* (Kissinger, 1994). This book teaches children where they get their skin color, namely the sun, where their ancestors were born, their parents, and the amount of melanin they have. Ms. Lupita was at the part where the book explained that a person's skin color was related to where their ancestors lived. Ms. Lupita posed the question, "So who thinks their ancestors lived in a place with less sun and heat?" Students eagerly raised their hands, with quite a few sharing aloud. Claire (White, 6) mentioned where her dad lived. Ms. Lupita interpreted her response as a lack of understanding for the word *ancestors*. Ms. Lupita attempted to explain the term by noting, "Not just your mom and dad, your aunt and uncle. But maybe like your great-great-great-grandparents." Claire responded, "I've met my great-great-grandparents, and my great-

grandparents, and they're all White." This comment caught me by surprise because the question was about geography and ancestors but not necessarily race. Claire was very proud to make a declaration about seeing and naming the race of her family.

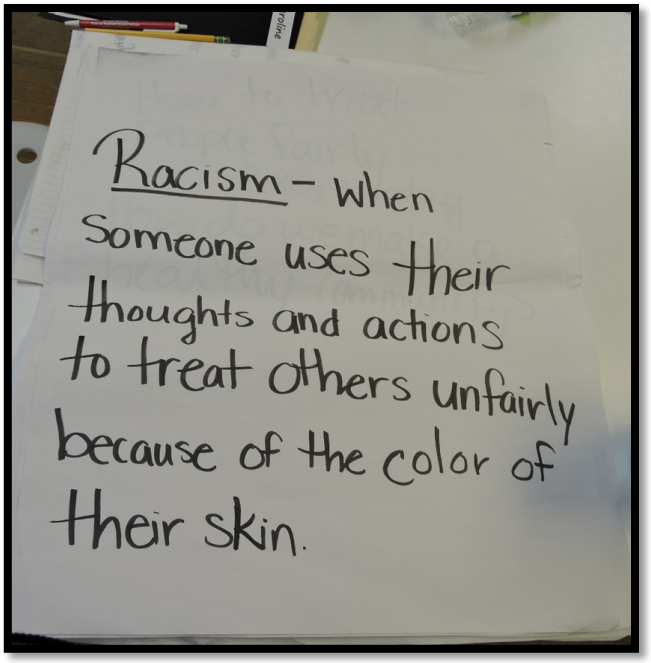


Figure 4.2 Racism Defined

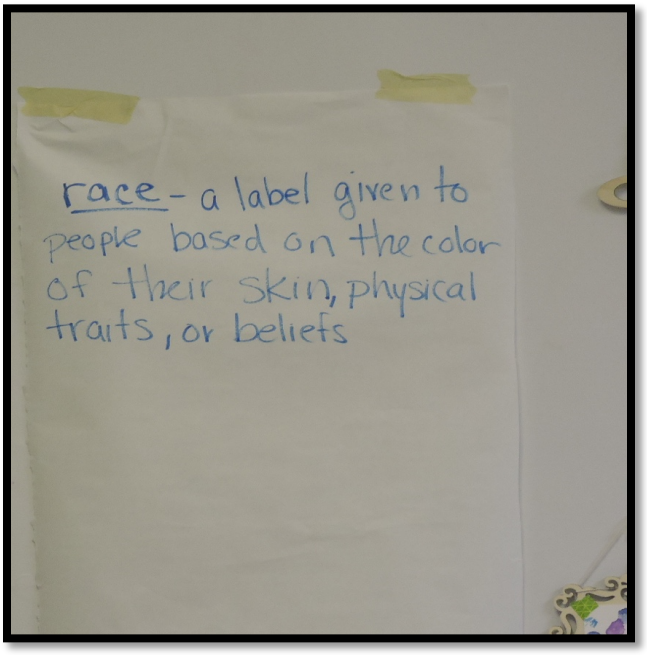
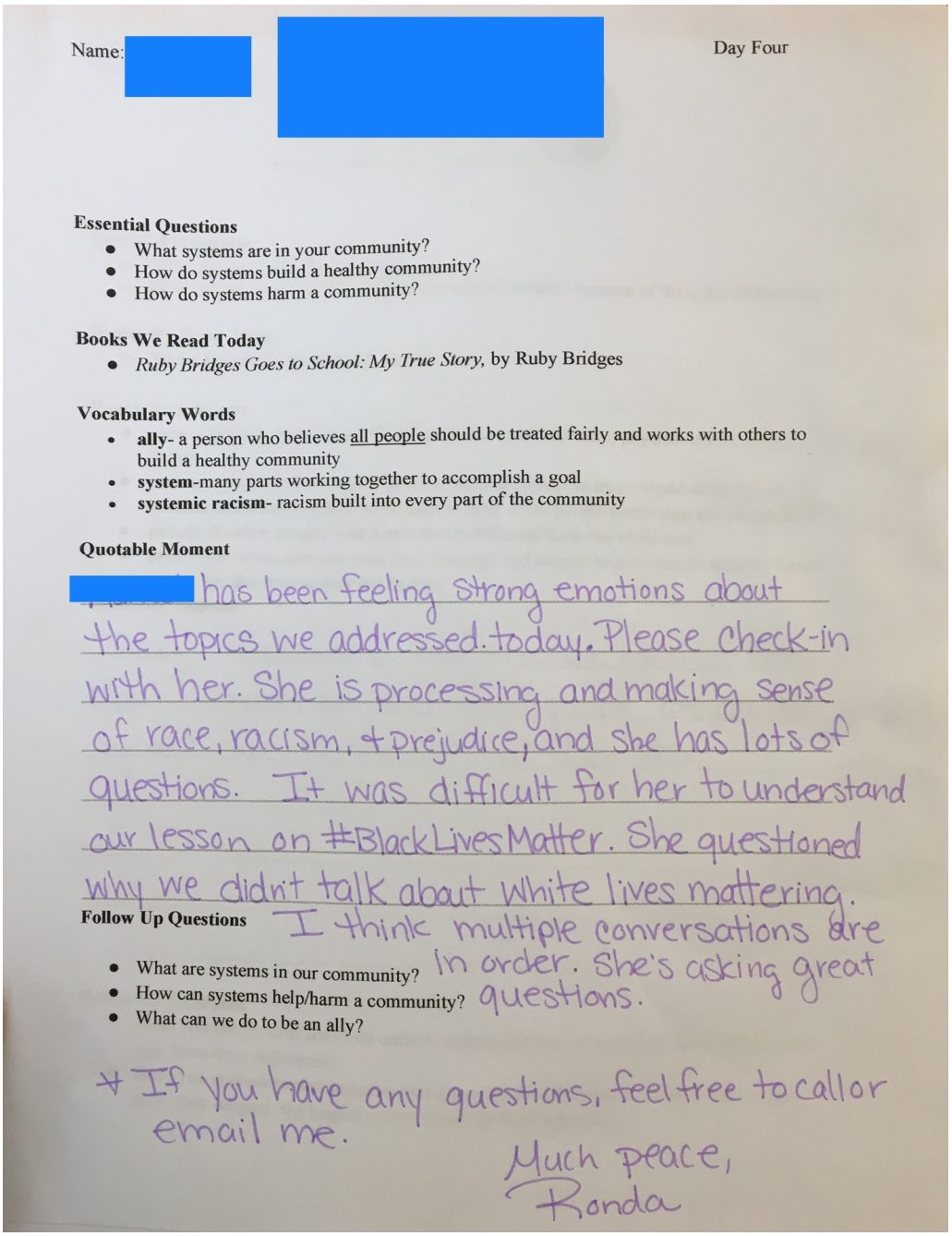


Figure 4.3 Race Defined

Claire's excitement on Day 2 juxtaposed a teary-eyed confession she made on Day 4 regarding recognizing whiteness. The focus of this day was systems. The essential questions were: 1. What are systems in your community? 2. How do systems build a healthy community? 3. How do systems harm a community? The day began with Ms. Heather, who is White, reviewing the previous day's lesson. As a group, the class revisited the definition of race and racism (see Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3). Ms. Heather informed students that we would make connections between racism and systems. The group then sang the birthday song for Ms. Lupita and engaged in our Shabooya Roll Call, a name game where students say their name and talk about themselves in rhythm. I provide this context because even though we started with race and racism, the day had a light mood.

Ms. Heather introduced our text for the day, *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* (Bridges, 2009). This text is based on the true story of Bridges, written by herself, and it documents her experiences desegregating schools. I noticed Claire had pulled herself away from the group. She was sitting with her knees pulled to her chest, her head buried into her knees. She looked up, and I saw that her face was red, and her checks were wet. I walked to her and asked if she would step outside of the room with me. Her arms were folded as if they were protecting her. Once outside, I told Claire what I noticed about her body language and asked if she was ok. With tears in her eyes, Claire said, *Every day we talk about race. We've been talking about what White people have been doing to Black people. I'm White* (held out arm for me to see), *and I'm not doing these things. I don't want to be—* and she paused. I am not sure if she was going to say that she did not want to be White or if she did not want to be causing harm to Black people or maybe something completely different. But, she paused as tears continued to flow from her



Name: [redacted] [redacted] Day Four

Essential Questions

- What systems are in your community?
- How do systems build a healthy community?
- How do systems harm a community?

Books We Read Today

- *Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story,* by Ruby Bridges

Vocabulary Words

- **ally**- a person who believes all people should be treated fairly and works with others to build a healthy community
- **system**-many parts working together to accomplish a goal
- **systemic racism**- racism built into every part of the community

Quotable Moment

[redacted] has been feeling strong emotions about the topics we addressed today. Please check-in with her. She is processing and making sense of race, racism, & prejudice, and she has lots of questions. It was difficult for her to understand our lesson on #BlackLivesMatter. She questioned why we didn't talk about White lives mattering.

Follow Up Questions I think multiple conversations are in order. She's asking great questions.

- What are systems in our community?
- How can systems help/harm a community?
- What can we do to be an ally?

* If you have any questions, feel free to call or email me.

Much peace,
Ronda

Figure 4.4 Note to Claire's Parents

eyes. Because Claire had such an emotionally distressing response that morning, I shared the incident with her parents on DPI's daily sheet form (see Figure 4.4). One of my apprehensions in hosting an anti-racism camp with White children was not knowing how to handle White children connecting their race to the collective White identity. I tell people that we fail if White

children leave our camp hating themselves (and we fail if children of color do the same). I do not know if that was the direction Claire was heading, but I wanted to be cautious. At the same time, I did not want to placate her realization. She *is* White, and she is racially associated with the group of people who have historically caused racial harm against people of color. It is important that White children understand this. So, I told her that yes, while she was White like the people causing racial harm, she can also use her race (not sure if this was clear to her) to fight against racism and be different. I asked her if she knew the term *ally* and if she had read *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* (Bridges, 2009), which was the book Ms. Heather was about to start reading. I told her about Ruby's White teacher challenging racism, that she was an ally, and that she, like Ruby's teacher and her (Claire's) own parents, were allies. Her parents were allies

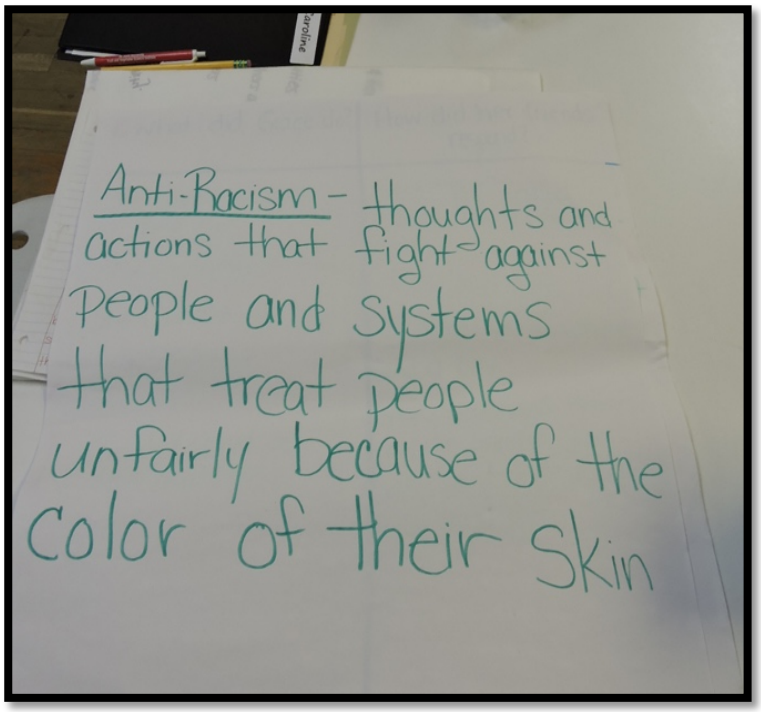


Figure 4.5 Antiracism Defined

for sending her to this camp. I also told Claire that I thought what she was processing was important, and that I wanted her to share it with the class. My thinking was there might be other

White students who felt similarly, and I wanted to ensure they understood that being an ally was also an option. Once Claire spoke to the class, recounting almost verbatim what she shared with me in the hallway, Madison (White, 6) professed, "I felt the same way."

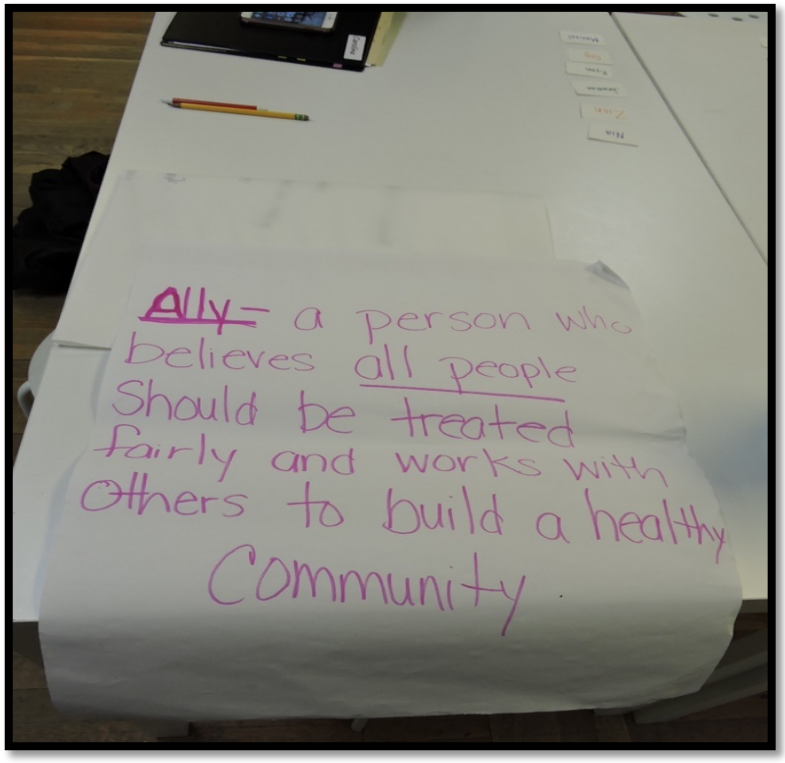


Figure 4.6 Ally Defined Image

Madison also demonstrated an ability to recognize whiteness. Day 5 of Camp 1 focused on anti-racism, activism, and allyship (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6). But before the activities of the day began, students were allowed to play with manipulatives and socialize while students finished up breakfast. Ms. Heather and I observed an interaction between Madison and Jasmine (Black, 5). Both of them were playing near each other on the floor. Madison had the purple manipulatives, small stackable cubes, that Ms. Heather had used the previous day to demonstrate disproportionalities between Black and White students being suspended. Madison had two separate stacks, just like Ms. Heather had modeled (see Figure 4.7). One of the stacks was

visibly longer than the other. In fact, it was hyperbolically longer. Madison turned to Jasmine and snidely professed, "This would be me," pointing to the shorter stack. "And this would be you," pointing to the extremely long stack of manipulatives. Ms. Heather and I both witnessed this, and she took Madison outside to have a conversation with her regarding the way she used that model to talk about racial disparities.

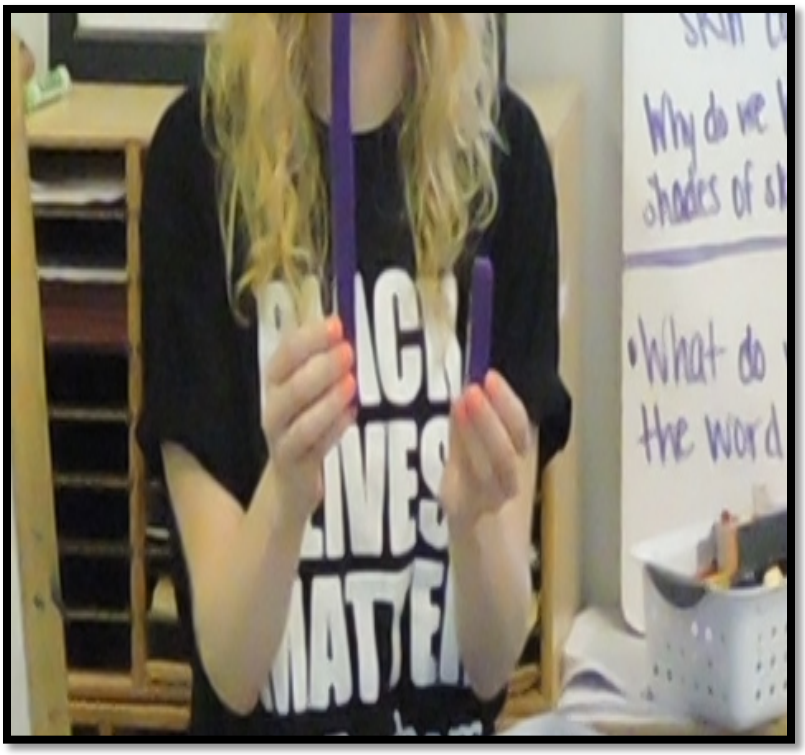


Figure 4.7 School-to-Prison Pipeline Model

While Madison did not use the words *white* and *black*, she insinuated a recognition of which stack represented her in the model and which the other Black girl. Madison's tone implied that she was using the model for negative and not positive reasons.

In contrast, many of the older White students recognized and named whiteness in a way that contributed to moving anti-racism conversations forward. The discussion was prompted by first viewing a short video. Day 3 of Camp 2, we watched a four-minute video titled *Being 12: What are you?* (WNYC, 2015). The video was a part of a series titled *Being 12*, created by New

York City public radio station WNYC. In the clip, students from diverse backgrounds shared about their experiences understanding race and racism as 12-year-old children growing up in Manhattan, NY. For example, one African American girl expressed her concern when she realized she was being followed by a sales clerk in a clothing store. In another example, a White girl shared her definition of white privilege, noting that "in your everyday life you're getting treated differently, and sometimes with more respect or people just trust you more…" (WNYC, 2015).

Frida (White, 10) moved the anti-racism conversation forward when she named *privilege* as a benefit of being White after watching the video. The comment occurred when Mr. Sam was leading the session. Frida confidently named what it means to be White. She articulated, "Well, you get more privilege, but it's not necessarily earned. You just get it … It's just given to you." Mr. Sam pushed Frida to explain her meaning of *privilege.* She added, "Privilege is when people think you're better than someone else, even though you really didn't do anything. It's just the way it is." "It's just the way it is" is very similar to a rhetorical pattern Bonilla-Silva (2014) found when studying White adults. The phrase was used to naturalize racism, as if it is simply a part of the world we live. Frida, used it here in a similar way. Ethan (bi-racial, 8) added, "Even if you get in trouble, you're still respected more." In these instances, the two children made connections to the unearned benefits of whiteness.

For a point of comparison, many White adults struggle with thinking about white privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). In an anti-racism training with the Racial Equity Institute, an organization in Greensboro, NC, they engage in an activity where they ask members of each racial category what they like best about their race. I have attended two trainings, and in both, White adults struggled with this question, fumbling through their responses. Some

acknowledged, “I’ve never thought about it before.” Thus, the White children’s ability to make this connection between privilege and whiteness, without hesitation, was powerful.

In Camp 2, another student named whiteness when recounting experiences involving her younger sister who identifies as Black. Emily (White/Filipino, 10) talked about times where she noticed “little white kids” touching her sister’s hair. Emily said, “And they always stare at her hair, and they’ll just grab it….” To Emily, this was funny. Her sister, though, would question, “Why are they touching my hair?” and wonder why her hair was different. Emily shared that she would tell her sister that her hair was “cool” and “special” and “so pretty.” Emily recognized that it was White girls and not *girls* in general touching her sister’s hair. Based on her statements to her sister, Emily also knew that in those moments, she needed to affirm her sister’s identity, her uniqueness, and her beauty. Emily may not understand the severity and depth of what it feels like to be a young Black girl turned into a petting zoo, as noted by her light-hearted “it’s super funny” comment, but she recognized that in those moments when other White children were being mean to her Black sister, she needed to support her Black sister.

Shame and guilt. Shame and guilt are definitely associated with White adult responses to seeing and recognizing whiteness. I did not want to assume, from this adult-centric perspective, that young White children would express these same emotions, but they did. As mentioned earlier, Claire (White, 6) began to cry when she realized she shared the same skin color as the group of people who were harming Black and Brown communities in acts of racism. One could argue that she was experiencing shame. Later in the week, her shame shifted; I will explain this more in the Reifying section. In Camp 1, Claire seemed to be the only one who verbalized a connection between her own Whiteness and that of the oppressors or the ones causing harm. With the older children, this was different.

In Camp 2, a few students talked about their feelings of guilt. Children used a form of the word *guilty* at least 12 times over the course of the 40-minute conversation. Jamie (White/Filipino, 8) used it first. Jamie confessed that sometimes but not "most of the time," she "might feel a little bit guilty about [her] race." Adding that she "[knows she] shouldn't feel it because it's not [her] treating other people badly." Frida chimed in, *Like that girl said in the video, sometimes you feel guilty for all of the privilege that you're given, even though you didn't earn it. Even though you know it's not your fault, you still feel guilty.* Here, both girls seem to be struggling with feeling responsible for the benefits they receive while also reconciling that they are not responsible for what has happened. It is progressive thinking for fourth and fifth grade White children to be processing who they are and how they situate their beliefs regarding white privilege. Again, many White adults have difficulty articulating what these children did. Had they, White adults, been able to do that as children, I imagine a healthier self-love could have developed (Sullivan, 2012).

In this same conversation, other children added their thoughts regarding guilt. Here is an excerpt:

Mr. Sam: When do you feel guilty? When does that happen?

Frida: When I hear about the police shootings on the news—

Mr. Sam: Yeah

Frida: I feel guilty.

Mike (White, 9): I'm thinking about the loss of, um…I can't remember his name, but he ends in Brown. He got shot.

Mr. Sam: Mike Brown.

Mike: Yeah. I went to that protest, and I'm just remembering those rememories.

The children connected the privilege they receive to the guilt of knowing that Black people are being murdered by police officers. None of them named the police as White, but they understood that it was Black people and not White people being murdered based on the guilt they expressed from being White.

Reifying Whiteness

Little White lies. White children in the camp demonstrated several instances of reifying whiteness. By this I mean that they affirmed or made it present in the conversation. One of the ways children reified whiteness was through telling stories of victimization that did not actually take place. In the younger camp, one story took me by surprise. It occurred during a small group session that Ms. Heather led. I learned about the conversation when I checked-in with her during the day. According to Ms. Heather, she asked the group if they had ever witnessed a person or a friend of color being discriminated against. Molly (White, 6) declared that once a Black girl threw rocks at her and called her "whitey." Ms. Heather asked Molly how this made her feel, and Molly responded that it made her sad. Molly added that she told her mom, and her mom got the Black girl to stop.

At some point during the day, Ms. Heather shared this story with me. I decided to include a summary of the story on the daily sheet we sent home to parents. At this point, I was thinking Molly was a victim of discrimination. Nonetheless, it was an email from Molly's mom, Susan, where she revealed that she had "never heard about this incident." Molly's mom wrote me an email, of which an excerpt is included below:

> I want to ask you about the quotable moment that came home in [Molly's] folder yesterday: "[Molly] shared that once on a visit to the park a Black girl called her 'whitey' and threw rocks at her. We named this as prejudice and discussed ways to respond if this happens again." We had never heard about this incident and were concerned to read about it. Do you know which counselor heard her tell this story, or was it you? I'd love to follow up with them if possible.

Thanks so much,
Susan

Molly's mom believed the story was untrue, I learned later, because she did not recall an incident where this had happened. I did not get a chance to respond to the email, but I saw Molly's mom at our closing ceremony the next day. Susan approached me and expressed concern. Susan said she asked Molly about the incident, and Molly would not admit that the story was untrue. Susan wanted to know if other children heard the story because she did not want it to "cause harm" to any of the others. I told her that none of the children of color heard the comment, but this was no consolation as the White children believed that Molly was racially attacked by a Black girl. The damage was already done.

Another instance of lying occurred during the small group discussion after reading *The Streets are Free* (Kurusa, 1985). Based on a true story, the book recounts how young children in Caracus, Venezuela, organized and petitioned their city council because there were no safe places for children to play. In the breakout session, facilitators helped students make connections between the lives of the children in the book with their own. We used *recognizing*, *resisting*, and *revising* to help students think through the anti-racism and activism represented in the book (see Figure 4.8). Students discussed how they could recognize issues of injustice in their own community, find ways to resist it, and then revise or create a plan to implement change.

I led my small group's breakout session. This was our regular meeting group. From Day 1, each facilitator was assigned a small, mixed-race group of children to work with for the week. Anytime we had a breakout session, we would meet in these groups. My group consisted of seven students, four students of color and three White.

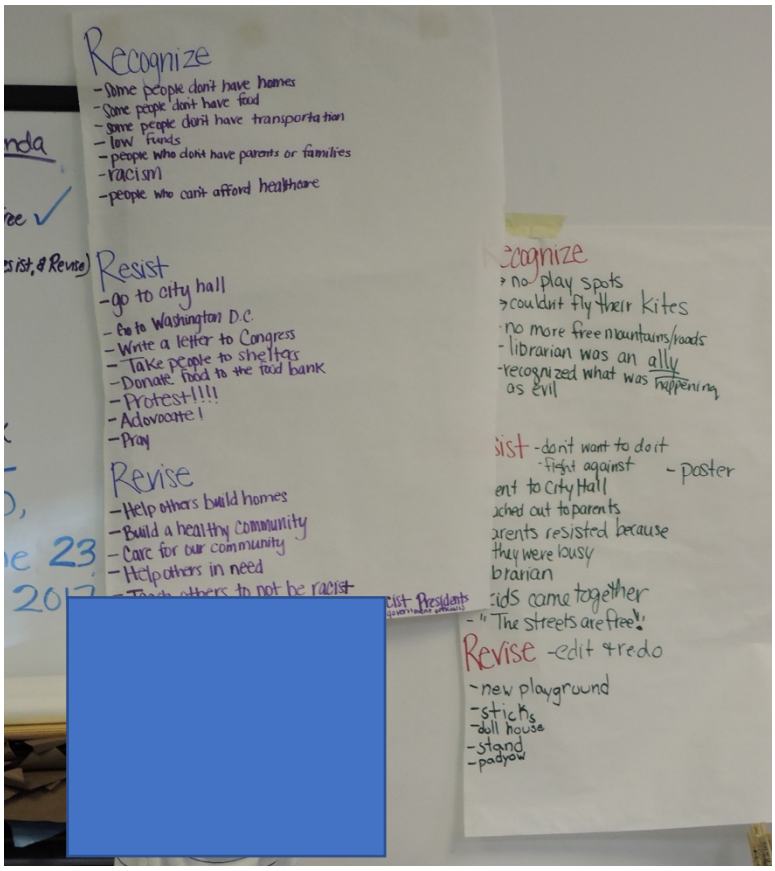


Figure 4.8 Recognizing, Resisting, and Revising

We were discussing the Black Lives Matter movement, which I will elaborate on in the next section. I mentioned that Black people were being mistreated by the police, and that was the reason why the movement began. Whites were not, I explained, being mistreated by the police in the same way. At that point, Claire (White, 6) interjected, *My grandpa didn't do anything. He's White and a Black (emphasis added) officer killed him with a gun*. With curiosity, I questioned, "A Black officer killed your grandpa?"

Claire: Wait, no, not my grandpa, my great-great-grandpa.

Me: (incredulously) Are you sure a Black officer did that?

Claire: (innocently) My parents told me.

I proceeded to acknowledge Claire's story, and then helped the group to recognize that we were discussing current issues related to police brutality. I noted that "right now what's happening with police is that Black lives are being killed, and then the people aren't being held accountable for it," and that justice was not happening for them. In Chapter Five, I will provide additional commentary and reflection on this encounter.

In the moment, I questioned the validity of Claire's story, but I did not have proof that it was not true. Over the summer I eventually followed-up with one of her parents. The parent was someone with whom I had a personal relationship. I asked the parent if any family member had been killed by a Black police offer. The parent replied no. I then shared Claire's story, and the parent confirmed that it, indeed, was not factual.

White lives matter. During the same breakout session as described above, one of the students reified whiteness by proclaiming, "White Lives Matter." Madison (White, 6) made the comment after T'Challa (Black, 6) used the phrase "Black Lives Matter". One African American student had just shared a story about his aunt being a victim of violence. In response, I commented that maybe we could think about how we help people treat each other in a healthy, kind, and loving way. T'Challa pulled an example from the book we read, *The Streets are Free* (Kurusa, 1985) and added how he would have responded. T'Challa proclaimed, *I would say, 'The streets are free! It doesn't matter what color we are. The streets are free! Black Lives Matter!'* I affirmed T'Challa's comments and called on Madison, whose hand was raised. I asked, "You have something you want to add about your community?" Madison challenged, "Um, I wanted to say that (long pause) Black Lives Matter. White lives matter, also." Claire said the word *white* in unison with Madison, and it felt like an emphasizing point.

I was completely caught off guard—not surprised—but off guard, by her comment. I believe hearing Claire echo *white* did something to me. In that moment, I had to remember that I was working with young children and not adults. I reminded the group of the discussion we had the previous day, making sure that they understood that when we said Black Lives Matter, it did not mean that *only* Black lives matter. Madison angrily interjected, "You have to be fair to us!" I continued to explain that Black and Brown people were being mistreated by the police. It was at that point that Claire interrupted with her story about her great, great grandpa being killed by a Black police officer. I continued to push back, making sure they knew Black Lives Matter was not saying that White lives and Latino lives and Asian lives did not matter. In a snarky tone, Claire fired back, "It sure seems that way!" And instinctively, Madison quipped, "It sure seems that way."

I thought I was going to have to take a break. At that point, I questioned, "Can I do this work with White children?" My heart started racing, and I felt my breathing shift. This was my body's normal response to experiencing racism. I felt like I was being attacked by a sea of whiteness when in reality, there were only two little White children who came prepared to defend their identity. Claire and I got into a verbal struggle for the floor. I was trying to talk, and she kept interrupting:

Me: *Remember we talked about that list of all Black people who were killed by police—*

Claire: (interrupting) I bet—

Me: (continuing over her) *No White people were on that list. It was all Black (stated with emphasis) people who were on that list—*

Claire: I bet—

Me: *And that's why it was the Black people who were being treated unfairly*.

Madison piped in, "I bet there were some children on that list." This threw me off because it did not align with her previous argument. I affirmed Madison and named Tamir Rice and Trayvon Martin as child victims on the list and talked about how there were a lot of Black kids being harmed, too.

Claire: (countered) I bet there's a list the same size of White people too!

Me: It's not.

I proceeded to remind the children about Ms. Heather's demonstration of every time one White person gets sent to jail, three Black people go. We talked a little more about police treating Black people unfairly. Before we ended the conversation, I allowed Molly (White, 6) to have the last comment. As we were preparing to leave, she announced, "When I grow up, I want to be a policeman."

Deflection. Throughout both camps, children reified whiteness through deflection. I use the term "deflection" to describe moments where White children would provide a comment that would take the floor away from the topic or that would center themselves rather than allow the focus to be on the topic of race or racism. Day 3 of Camp 1 was the first day of the week where we intentionally discussed racism. We began in the morning by having the children look at the word "Racism" written on chart paper. I asked the class, "What do you know about this word 'racism?'" I gave students time to think, and then I had them shout out their responses as I recorded them on the paper. Students called out an array of answers and named things such as "White people and Brown people couldn't use the same bathrooms." Please note at this age, young children will often use "Brown" to refer to Black people. Students also mentioned separate water fountains and "Black people not being able to sit at the front of the bus."

I read the center piece text for the day, *These Hands* (Mason, 2011). In the text a Black grandfather spoke with his grandson about all of the things his hands were unable to do because of the color of his skin. It was during the post discussion that student deflection was evident. Alison (White/Native/American/Arabic, 7) shared a story about watching a video in school, presumably about the Greensboro sit-ins, where a "White person wouldn't let a Black person eat at a restaurant because they weren't White." Ms. Heather asked, "Was that fair?" Molly (White, 6) raised her hand and said, "It's not about this. Yesterday I got cut by glass, and it really hurt." It was interesting that Molly knew, by her own admission, that her comment was off topic. Ms. Heather redirected the group to stick with the current focus of the conversation.

Another student, Chloe (White/Latinx, 7) shared a heartfelt story about her father being mistreated because of his race. Then Ms. Heather asked the group, "How did it make you feel to talk about this right now?" Alison said she felt good "because other people could give you ideas of what to say if that happens to you." Jake (White, 5) lamented, "I feel bad…because you were talking about all the bad stuff that happened." When Ms. Heather asked for other responses, Madison (White, 6) interjected, "It makes me feel itchy because my tag in my dress is itching me." In this moment, Madison used a personal pronoun for four out of fourteen words in her short sentence. When students were reflecting on this very powerful and impactful conversation, she deflected away from that space. She may have been feeling uncomfortable, and her story about the itchy tag freed her from that discomfort. On the other hand, one could also argue that all children, like Madison, are easily distracted. Perhaps the feeling her tag was giving her took precedence over the conversation, and she just had to comment. Or maybe her emotional discomfort was hard for her to identify, but her physical discomfort was easy to pinpoint, so she

focused on the tag as the source of all of it. I believe Madison used the story as a way to deflect from an uncomfortable conversation about racism.

Another instance of deflection occurred while students were sharing their drawings with the whole group. Prior to this convening the children had been in their small groups, creating a drawing to help them either express their current feelings or to represent a time where they witnessed or experienced racism. All of the campers came back together to share their work with the whole group. Ms. Lupita, before sharing time, reminded everyone to "listen to one another" because they were sharing "really personal" stories, and that in order to create a "healthy community" they needed to value everyone's feelings. Three children, one White-passing, bi-racial child and two Black boys had shared their stories of hurt that happened either to them personally or to a family member.

After the three children talked about their drawings and narratives, Molly deflected by saying, "A Black threw mulch at me." "Say what?!?" Ms. Lupita exclaimed. Molly replied, "A Black once threw mulch at me." Ms. Lupita instructed Molly to say "a Black person" so that the group would not just use color to identify a person. The three previous stories were about White people harming people of color. Not only did Molly's story shift the focus, her use of language also caused Ms. Lupita to pause. Thus, her quick response of "Say what?!?" "A Black" objectifies Black people as other and is dehumanizing. I will not argue that Molly's intent was to dehumanize Black people, but her intent was to deflect away from three stories about harm White people caused. Through data analysis, I now know that this was the second time Molly had used this story on that day. As previously mentioned, she shared it in one of the small groups. As a reminder, her mother let me know that the story was fictional. Molly told this little

white lie twice, and she used it to detract away from stories where White people were harming people of color.

Resisting Whiteness

Many children in both camps resisted whiteness. Resisting whiteness meant that children challenged ideas that supported racism or they verbally countered stories of their friends that took the group away from addressing uncomfortable situations. At other times, they openly rejected the privileges afforded by their white skin.

(Re)direction. The camp co-facilitators asked lots of questions throughout the camps. Sometimes questions were very specific, pushing children to talk about racism either from incidences in their lives or the books we read. While some White children would deflect from questions, others would redirect back to the topic or offer very specific, relevant stories. For example, during one discussion about racism, Madison (White, 6) recounted a story about her younger sibling being mistreated on the playground. The story did not have anything to do with race but was related to unfair treatment. After she shared her story, Alison (White/Native/American/Arabic, 7) talked about being in the anti-racism camp the previous summer and witnessing one camper say something offensive to another. Alison noted that someone was "drawing a picture of themselves with a little bit of a lighter brown than their skin color." She added, "And then somebody said, 'Hey, you have darker skin.'" Alison brought the focus on the conversation back to racism.

In another example, one of the White campers started talking about her "family [who was] White." There was no connection to racism; she just made this announcement. Chloe (White/Latinx, 7) followed up and redirected the conversation with a narrative about her dad who is Latino. As a reminder, Chloe is bi-racial and passes as White. Chloe explained that her

dad "moved to the United States from [Latin America]." During that time, according to Chloe, he only had two friends. In a separate conversation, where Chloe showed up in a similar way, she elaborated on her dad's story, adding, "People teased him and called him Jesus* instead of Rico*… He didn't speak English, he didn't wear the same clothes and people teased and jeered at him." In both instances, Chloe either redirected or provided a direct example to help other campers understand what racism looks like.

Day 3 of Camp 2, we showed students a clip from *Race, the Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003). In this particular clip, a narrator shared a few of Thomas Jefferson's words from when he spoke on the state of Virginia in the late 1700s. The narrator talked about Jefferson owning slaves while also writing that all men were created equal in the Declaration of Independence (US 1776). A few of the White students co-created a story to explain why Jefferson owned slaves. It was interesting because one Black child insinuated that he was a hypocrite for owning slaves and another repeatedly called Jefferson a liar. Meanwhile, Jamie (White/Filipino, 8) offered, "[Thomas Jefferson] would have bought slaves to let them go and live a free life, and he would have made a hidden house with his money to protect them from other people." Other students chimed in about the genius of buying slaves to set them free. I reminded the students that those events had not taken place in the documentary and feared that students would remember the narrative Jamie initiated over the reality of what was presented in the video. I posed, "I heard somebody say the word inferior. What did you notice? Why is that word important? Where did it come from in the video?" Frida momentarily saved the discussion by saying, "Thomas Jefferson said that Black people were inferior to White people … He said it right out there. It wasn't buried or anything. He just said it." Her comment allowed me to revisit the term we taught them earlier that day: White supremacy.

Parents and protesting. As one might expect, parents played a role in helping students resist whiteness. I previously mentioned that the parents and guardians willingly signed their children up to participate in this anti-racism summer camp. Further, parents played a significant role in their children's identity construction. For the White children, particularly, they repeatedly mentioned their parents and/or their parents protesting.

The first mention came from Gabe (Latino/White, 7). We were having a whole-group discussion about allyship. We talked about how White people have caused harm, but they can also work with people of color to create a healthy community. I was leading a follow-up discussion after Ms. Heather finished reading *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* (Bridges, 2009). I intentionally named Ruby's teacher as White and mentioned that she was an ally to Ruby. Gabe piped up and said, "My dad is White, and he protests!" He added, "I've been to a lot of protests!" Next, both Chloe and Alison shared stories that involved their parents. Chloe mentioned her dad protested several times. We can infer that he shared stories about racism with Chloe to educate her and help her resist.

In another example in Camp 2, Ethan recounted a story about his mother resisting white supremacy. The whole group was learning about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). I wanted to offer an alternative vision of whiteness to give White students something to aspire to become. I asked if anyone knew White people who said they wanted to challenge white supremacy and racial injustice to create a healthy community. Ethan responded saying, *My mom learned that White people are better than Black people, but she didn't believe it. She was just like, 'Oh, I don't believe that.'* Joseph, an African American student responded with, "She's an activist!"

Frida and Mike (White/9) shared stories involving their parents, too. Frida told the group about her mom following Little Miss Flint on Facebook. Little Miss Flint, whose real name is

Mari Copeny, is a ten-year-old Black girl from Flint, Michigan. She has been an activist since she was eight years old, when she wrote former President Obama about the water crisis in her hometown. Frida informed the group that Little Miss Flint "holds signs like 'this is how many days have been since the Flint water crisis,'" and that "her Facebook page is just full of pictures of her in marches." Frida's mom influenced her understanding of what was happening in Flint and helped Frida witness activism from a young person like herself. Another student, Mike shared that he had participated in several protests, presumably with his parents. One in particular was for Hillary Clinton, he said, "Because we hated Trump so much that we wanted to protest against him." Later in that conversation, Mike shared that his dad and his dad's side of the family are people he can speak with about activism.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how White children, specifically those attending an anti-racism summer camp, construct their racial identity. I also wanted to learn more about how White children normalize or resist whiteness. I used a critical race theory framework, aided by whiteness studies and critical discourse analysis. This approach has afforded me the opportunity to make the invisible visible. By this I mean that White children's ability to recognize, reify, and/or resist whiteness was made visible in this study. I offer a critical discussion of the data mentioned above. I have organized the analysis using subheadings that reflect concepts that emerged from the data.

Ownership before ally-ship. I struggled with my response to Claire (White, 6) on Day 4 of the camp. The moment I am referencing occurred when I pulled her to the side to discuss the emotions she was displaying. As a reminder, Claire was upset because she had come to the realization that the people responsible for racism were White like her. That encounter was

complex because it is important for White people to understand how they are a part of the collective White identity. As such, I did not want to placate Claire's emotions because I thought it was beneficial for her to sit with the uncomfortable reality that her people have historically harmed people of color. I also did not want to communicate that she and her family were different than "those White people" because this would other-ize the perpetrators of racial violence, further distancing regular White folks from believing that they are just as susceptible as the "other" to cause racial harm. This was a lot to process in a short amount of time, and it was a lot for a six-year-old to take on. Nonetheless, I talked with Claire about being an ally and informed her that she could do things differently but not that she was different. I acknowledged that she and the people causing harm shared the same race *and*, not "but," she could choose to be an ally. There has to be a reckoning among White people to acknowledge and take ownership before efforts toward ally-ship can begin. Should young White children be held accountable for doing this when most White adults will not? Absolutely. If White children learn a more accurate, inclusive White history—that involves tough realities—then they will be better equipped to live in a multi-racial world based in reality and not the White imagination (Morrison, 1992; Thandeka, 1999). Owning and understanding a truthful, complex White history must occur before ally-ship can happen.

Allowing Claire to speak with the class after our encounter has left me asking quite a few questions. Did I mess up by allowing Claire to share her feelings with the group? Was she experiencing white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011)? Did I do what folks always do when a White woman sheds White tears? Or was this situation different? Was I working with a child who was innocently crying because she realized something bad happened? Should I have just let her sit in her emotions, and not try to offer the perspective of an ally? Again, in the moment, there was

not much time to process the depth of our encounter. I feel, though, that I erred on the side of caution by trying to ensure that she was ok and that other children were not experiencing self-hate. Was I protecting White fragility or was I caring for a child who was venturing into a space she had never been before? To be honest, I do not know. If White children leave our camp hating themselves or other White people, we have failed. We were trying to create healthy identities, not harmful ones. People who hold internalized self-hatred cause harm to themselves and others. We were trying to prevent that, and this was my thinking behind allowing Claire to speak with the whole group about what she was experiencing.

On the need to understand #BlackLivesMatter. In retrospect, when Claire and Madison proclaimed that *White lives matter also*, I understood where they were coming from—maybe not in that moment, but in hindsight I do. Children see Black Lives Matter and immediately recognize unfairness. For White children, they see that "white" is missing. They do not know the history nor the context of the movement, nor can they see the implied "too." Again, this is understandable for first- and second-graders. I can accept this from a child, but not from White adults. To a White child, Black Lives Matter may seem unfair, and this is why children, and particularly White children need to be taught the historical context for this current social movement. Otherwise, it will feed into the larger social narrative of Whites being victims of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Sullivan, 2006; Ambrosio, 2014). I hear all the time "What if there was a White lives matter movement?" My response is, "Has the movement ever stopped?" White lives matter is the basis of our society. I digress. If White children are not intentionally taught their history through an inclusive lens, one that addresses systemic racism, they will continue to operate in a false reality causing harm to themselves and people of color around them.

Further, in having the #BlackLivesMatter discussion, I was not prepared for the resistance. When I shared about why the movement existed and that it did not mean *only* but rather *also*, some of the children would not believe me. Why? That resistance to facts in order to preserve whiteness begins early. Little children are not as gullible as many adults think they are. They have their own thoughts and opinions, and many are capable of articulating those. One might interpret the resistance as kids being kids. But because I analyze data through a CRT lens, I cannot omit the impact race had on this conversation.

Making sense of Claire's shift. What am I to make of Claire's shift from Day 4 to Day 5? I think I misinterpreted her tears. At first, I thought she was coming to terms with the realization that her people had caused historical racial trauma—treated Black people unfairly—and was going to be in a place of wanting to make things better. That was not the case based on what transpired Day 5, regarding the made-up story about her grandpa and the back and forth about Black Lives Matter. Her actions led me to believe that she *doubled down* on whiteness. By this I mean she upped or increased her support and defense of whiteness, regardless of the truth.

This recognition is not to vilify Claire, but to name what whiteness has historically done and continues to do (Bell, 1980; Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 1998; Thandeka, 1999; Thompson Dorsey and Chambers, 2014). In the wake of many advancements for people of color, White violence has increased. The presence of equity is treated like a threat to the White identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). After Claire made the realization, rather than latch on to the idea of being an ally, she upped her defense of whiteness in order to preserve her sense of superiority, which aligns with the third part of Thompson Dorsey and Chambers' (2014) CDR cycle: reclamation. Claire's pushback through her false narrative was an attempt to reclaim power and take up space.

The dangers of little white lies. Everybody lies. All of us, young, old, and in between. However, some lies are more dangerous than others. Sometimes people lie out of fear, to avoid consequences. Some people lie to protect others from the truth. Whatever the reason, people do it. The examples from *Little White Lies* in the study, however, are different. They are dangerous. We must consider the historical context of what happens when Whites tell lies about Black people. Emmett Till, the Scottsboro Boys, and countless others come to mind. Two White men kidnapped, mutilated, and murdered Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Black child, in 1955 in Money, Mississippi (Goldsby, 1996). Roy Bryant and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, attacked Till after Bryant's wife, Carolyn, claimed that Till whistled at her. In *The Blood of Emmet Till*, published in 2017, Carolyn admitted that she lied in an interview with author, Tim Tyson. This lie cost Emmet Till his life, leaving his mother, and many in our country, in mourning.

In 1931, two White women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, falsely accused nine African American teenagers, ages 13-19, of rape while riding a train in Alabama (Linder, 1999). The nine became known as the Scottsboro Boys. All but one of the them, Leroy Wright, the youngest, was sentenced to death by an all-White, all male jury. Through re-trial after re-trial and time spent in jail, the young boys' lives were ruined due to White lies and a criminal justice system that validated them.

White children need to be explicitly taught the power they hold in their words and the danger of lying about Black people, specifically, and people of color more generally. Some might argue that #AllLiesMatter, and we should teach children to tell the truth, period. But all lies do not matter the same. A child telling a parent that they did not eat the last cookie, when she actually did, does not have the same consequences as a little White girl saying "a Black

threw mulch" at her. When a White person feels threatened, and feels the need to enact self-preservation, relying on the mythical Black boogie man to relieve the pressure of that threat is dangerous and must be condemned early. I recommend explicitly teaching White children about the dangers of lying about Black people.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

In this chapter, I presented findings related to the research questions of my study. Through student discourse, I provided multiple examples of White children recognizing, reifying, and resisting whiteness. All of these categories helped me, as the researcher, better understand how White children are processing and constructing their racial identity. I offered analysis based on the findings, and generated interpretations of the data. In the final chapter, I will offer implications, including but not limited to a review of the current study, a connection to existing literature, study contributions, limitations, and researcher reflections.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

I embarked on this research journey to enhance my understanding of how White children construct their racial identity. This final chapter recaps the purpose and problem for the study, while discussing findings in conjunction with current literature. I present limitations, implications and make recommendations for future research. I conclude this chapter by engaging in reflexivity and offering researcher reflections.

Chapter One defined the research problem in terms of racial identity construction being present in infancy. Three-month-old babies can recognize a difference in skin color and by six-months, Black, Brown, and White children demonstrate a preference for those who share their skin color (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Gibson, Smith, Ge, & Pascalis, 2005; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). This is not inherently a problem. By kindergarten, though, the preference for people of one's own skin color decreases for children of color but increases for Whites (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Researchers attribute this to an increase in exposure to media and stereotypical images of marginalized communities (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Beliefs of inferiority and superiority disrupt all children's educational experiences and life outcomes (Thandeka, 1999; Sue et al., 2009). As research increases regarding the racial identity or the impact of racism, White children's racial identity construction is largely absent. It is imperative to understand how White children embody whiteness so that we can create informed ways of developing healthy racial identities.

Existing literature reveals that whiteness is afforded an invisibility that is accompanied by power (Bell, 1991; Harris, 1993; Lopez, 1994; Lipsitz, 1998; Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006).

Further, literature suggests that whiteness is an oppositional identity, in that it exists in juxtaposition to blackness (Thandeka, 1999; Morrison, 1992; DuBois, 1935). Without blackness, there is no whiteness. As such, studies about Black children's racial identities must be paralleled by studies of White children's racial identities.

Researchers who have studied White children and identity posit that even in pre-school, they have the ability to understand whiteness and can use it as a mechanism to cause harm, whether knowingly or unknowingly (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Dunham et al., 2008). For example, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) demonstrated that not only can White preschoolers define others in terms of difference from oneself, but they also acquire concepts related to race and ethnicity by creating rules that are invariably fluid. They argued that the ways in which children create these concepts were often very similar to the ways in which adults do the same.

The historical context of racial formation illuminates the structural foundation on which Whites created and systematically sustained racial identities (Bell, 1991; Harris, 1993; Lopez, 1994; Lipsitz, 1998; Thandeka, 1999). Thus, Chapter Two provided an in-depth history of race becoming real in America, while it also revealed studies where researchers grappled with the nuanced nature of race and identity.

I chose a unique context for this current research project. Participants in the study attended an anti-racism summer camp. I used a case study design to address the following questions:

1. What does racial identity construction look like for White children participating in an anti-racism summer camp?
2. How do White children normalize or resist whiteness?

My experiences as a Black woman growing up in the rural South reverberated throughout this research study. These experiences influenced my decision to become a critical race scholar and to subsequently choose a critical race theory (CRT) framework. The study reflected the following CRT tenets by: (1) centralizing race, (2) using my voice to challenge dominant narratives, and (3) keeping a social justice focus. I use White critical theory (WhiteCrit) to validate an emphasis on Whites, but only as doing so benefited people in marginalized communities. Last, I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to make visible the ways White children mitigate power and politics through language.

I employed a case study research design and used participant observation, a qualitative research method, to gather data. Field notes, observations, aggregate parent surveys, pictures of student work samples, and student work samples provided me with multiple data points for analysis. White children, who ranged in age from five to ten-years-old comprised the sample participants. They all participated in a week-long anti-racism summer camp, along with children of color, hosted by the Disruptive Peacemaking Institute (DPI). DPI is a non-profit located in Southeastern United States that provides anti-racism training programs for children, parents, and educators. Eight students were specifically profiled in this report as primary participants. Half of them attended the 1st-2nd grade camp, and the other half attended the 3rd-5th grade.

I presented the words and behaviors of the participants in this report. I inferred and interpreted their experiences in a way that speaks truth while also respecting their place in this world as young children. The narratives I have divulged reveal that young White children are constructing racial identities that are both harmful and healthy.

Contributions of Study

Researchers cannot truly understand children's racial identity construction unless we examine White children in addition to children of color. Studying White children whose parents willingly chose to send them to an anti-racism summer camp presented a unique case study of participants. This study contributes insight into how these children struggle with, engage, and embody their own ideologies around not only their race, but also the race of others.

This study builds upon the existing literature demonstrating that young children are grappling with race and racial identities (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Dunham et al., 2008; Miller, 2015). Multiple data sources, including observations, field notes, student work samples, and pictures of work samples generated narratives and concepts regarding what constructing a racial identity looks like for White children. Current literature, where the emphasis is on children and racial identity, suggests that White children's construction of race is nuanced and there is not a monolithic experience (Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Dunham et al., 2008). Further, many adult-centric concepts of whiteness were present and affirmed in this study (Bell, 1991; Morrison, 1992; Harris, 1993; Thandeka, 1999), for example, fragility and deflection (DiAngelo, 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Currently the research literature suggests that White children are actively aware of whiteness (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Findings in this study affirm this assertion. *Recognizing Whiteness* was a key theme that emerged from data analysis. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) found that White children are not naïve to race and can use their whiteness to enact power over others. White children in the current study demonstrated their understanding of whiteness in an adult-like way by discussing shame and guilt (Morrison, 1992;

Helms, 1997; Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). *Shame* and *guilt* are largely absent constructs from the child-centric studies.

This study explored White children's ability to resist whiteness. The findings purport that children employ various strategies to disrupt the reification of white supremacy. Rogers and Mosely (2006) showed that White children engaged in racial literacy strategies, exhibiting the ability to critique practices and laws that upheld whiteness. They disrupted the conversation in ways like what children in the current study did: as acts of ally-ship.

This study extends the current research literature about Whites' habits of deflecting during moments of discomfort when talking about race. Deflecting could be represented through the desire to physically distance oneself (Miller, 2015), as in leaving a space. It could also be represented through discursive moves that change the topic of the conversation (McIntyre, 1997; Thandeka, 1999; Sullivan, 2006; Rogers & Mosley, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Most of the literature expounding on these discursive moves have an adult-centric focus. Findings in this study revealed that White children employed similar strategies to mitigate what I inferred to be discomfort.

Absent from the existing literature regarding children's racial identity construction was the use of alternative facts, or lies, to reify whiteness. Telling lies could be associated categorically with McIntyre's (1997) White talk as a discursive move. Van Dijk (1987) found that racism is perpetuated through self-preservation, which I hypothesize as the function of lies in the current study. "In ethnic or racial affairs," van Dijk (1987) professes, "this may involve, e.g., denial of white racism and discrimination, and a systematic association of ethnic minorities with problematic cultural differences…" (p. 264). In both instances where lies were used, White children shifted the conversation in which Whites were portrayed as victimizers to one in which

Whites were victims of Black peoples' behavior. There is a historical precedent, as aforementioned, for Whites' use of lies against Black people; however, I do not believe this practice has been linked to White children's racial identity construction. Further research could explore whether this maneuver is a common practice.

Limitations

Some may argue this study was limited by a highly selective sample that was not representative of the general population. The families in this study chose, on their own volition, to put their child or children in an anti-racism summer camp. However, these unique circumstances highlight an understudied segment of our population and created an opportunity for exploration. One limitation of the study, though, is that I only focused on one particular setting, an anti-racism summer camp, held in a progressive urban city. Observing children at home, in schools, or in the community could enhance my overall findings.

Another limitation is related to credibility. Member checks serve as a means to establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Studying children presented a challenge to completing these types of checks. However, I supplemented this weakness through conducting peer briefings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I consulted other research scholars who study race and identity. Last, increasing observations of children in non-structured environments, during recess for example, would mitigate the possibility of students *performing* correct responses or providing answers that they think adults want to hear.

Implications

For White parents. Creating healthy racial identities in children must begin early. As evidenced in this study, young White children have the ability to process and understand complex histories and abstract concepts such as racism. They are not colorblind and are

constantly making sense of whiteness. White children have to receive support from their parents at an early age to help them understand the meaning of their skin color and to help them appreciate those from whom they are different. This will help mitigate feelings of superiority for their own racial community and lessen the beliefs about the inferiority of marginalized communities. Using age-appropriate books and videos, such as the ones mentioned in this study, will aid parents along the way. It is important to understand that developing a healthy racial identity is an ongoing process, a part of a lifetime journey. One five-day anti-racism summer camp is not enough. Advocating for texts written by authors from diverse backgrounds, featuring characters of color in non-stereotypical roles (i.e., playing sports or being an entertainer) will help all children develop a nuanced understanding of not only themselves but also people from whom they are different.

The talk. As previously mentioned, Black parents have what is known as *the talk* with our children, where we prepare them to navigate this world as Black people. It is time that White parents engage in a similar conversation. Findings from this study showed that White children are already reifying and defending whiteness. This is not healthy and has the potential to create harm for children of color. White parents must abandon "colorblind" approaches to raising their kids and talk with them explicitly about:

1. Skin color, race, and racism
2. How their race is connected to a history of racialized violence
3. Power and privilege afforded to Whites because of their skin color
4. The danger of lying about Black people
5. How to use their power and privilege to advocate for racial equity

For elementary educators. It is imperative that educators infuse instruction about racial identity and anti-racism into the curriculum. White children are making sense of their whiteness in ways that can generate harm, as evidenced in the study. Teachers have a profound ability to enact change due to the hours children spend with them, to enact change. Children are being influenced to hold stereotypical beliefs about themselves and others at early ages. They are synthesizing both implicit and explicit messages from television, social media, books, movies, the news, friends, and family about race. These messages link race to beliefs about good and evil, intelligence, superiority, etc. We cannot prevent White children from exposure to all of those messages, but we can better prepare children to process and challenge them.

Educators often say that elementary students are too young to talk about racism, and that they should wait until middle school. Middle schools pass the buck to high schools and many high schools will say wait until college. It is very possible for a child to go pre-kindergarten through college without ever learning about race, racial identity, or racism. Waiting until a better time is unrealistic. The current study supports existing literature that asserts young children are making sense of race. Elementary educators must educate themselves because many went through teacher preparation programs that did not prepare them for this type of teaching and learning (Miller, 2015a; Hunt, 2015). I recommend attending racial equity training and learning about culturally responsive teaching (Lasdon-Billings, 2001) to better prepare educators to talk and teach about racism. I also recommend doing an equity audit of the books located in the classroom libraries. Students can help with this process. They can chart different race and ethnic backgrounds of the authors and characters. They can also look for how many books are written by people from marginalized identities. Not only will educators be able to see what is represented in their classroom, but they will also be able to see what is missing. It is important,

especially in schools where there is an overwhelming White majority, to expose students to diverse characters to challenge the single story, mythical existence of the other.

For policymakers. As the saying goes, race-based problems cannot be addressed through race-neutral solutions. White children grow up to become White adults who often perpetuate racialized violence and uphold systemic racism. If White children are making sense of whiteness in both harmful and constructive ways, it is imperative that education policymakers write policies aimed at mitigating racial harm. This inclusion in policy will contribute to systemic changes, an emphasis of CRT. For example, policymakers can address this issue through adjustments in the curriculum. There should be standards that address helping students develop anti-racist, healthy racial identities. Teaching Tolerance created the Teaching Tolerance Anti-bias Framework that includes anchor standards and learning objectives for kindergarten through twelfth grade ("Teaching Tolerance," 2018). Resources such as these should be used to generate policies. The Southern Poverty Law Center started an initiative to fight against hate and bigotry in schools. Policymakers should hold school systems accountable for adopting racial equity curriculum standards that make sense for districts and hold schools accountable for adhering to the standards.

Schools play a pivotal role in shaping the identities of children. It is time for schools to take a pro-active approach to developing inclusive, anti-racist school communities. Children are thinking about and making sense of race. If we value equity, then we must help children contribute to healthy communities by promoting anti-racism.

Recommendations for Future Research

Limited research exists wherein young White children and their racial identities are critically examined. More studies need to explore this phenomenon so that researchers, parents,

and educators can make informed decisions about helping White children develop healthy racial identities. Personally, I would like to follow up with the children and the families who attended the camps. I would like to engage in a longitudinal study and check in with them one-year post-camp, then three years, and five years out. It would be interesting to see how the students' views and ideas about themselves and others shift and grow overtime. An additional follow-up to this study would be to allow parents to respond to the experiences of their children.

I would also like to study White children in other settings. For example, I would like to observe in a traditional classroom environment to introduce more variance into a study. A predominately White classroom or a racially diverse classroom, where thoughts, opinions, and upbringings are more heterogeneous than what was represented at the camp may or may not yield similar findings. Data from these types of studies will enhance how we are able to educate against racist ideologies and advocate for policy changes related to curriculum.

Researcher Reflections: A Counternarrative

I learned a plethora of lessons about research and data collection from completing this study. If I were to re-do this study, I would schedule breaks for myself during the day. Serving as the director, facilitator, and researcher was a lot to juggle. I was exhausted by the end of each day, and I did not have the energy or the time to write high-quality reflective notes. For a new study, I would schedule times during the day when I could step away to regroup and process in the moment. I would also pay more attention to the students during recess. Recess is a time where students' subconscious is more active. They are not thinking about their words and actions as much as they are when they are in the classroom setting.

Letting my guard down. I have been formally leading anti-racism work for the past five years. I have worked primarily with adults, though. In doing so, I always meditate and pray

before I lead a session. I have no idea how people, particularly Whites, will respond to facing truths about White supremacy. I arm myself with Biblical scriptures, peace, and love, and go in prepared for anything. I have to center myself before every talk or training.

For the camps my routine was similar, except my prayers were focused on logistics. I wanted to make sure greeters were in place to meet parents, that technology would work, that copies and materials were prepared, and that the food arrived on time. I did not prepare myself for the emotional work involved with discussing racism with children. I had let my guard down and was not ready, so to speak. Maybe I underestimated the power of White children.

You never know what a child will say that will trigger your vulnerabilities. One memorable instance occurred during the study when Claire and Madison professed that *White Lives Matter*. My body had a physical reaction when I heard this. My heart started racing, and my breaths became deeper. This is my body's normal reaction to racialized experiences. I had heard White people say this phrase on television, and I had read countless tweets, Facebook posts, and think pieces. But no White person had dared say it to my face. Hearing "White Lives Matter," coupled with the back and forth that ensued, made it clear that I could not let my guard down, even when working with White children. Anti-racism work is emotional at all levels, and I cannot fall into the trap of believing that I can ever operate outside of the experiences and emotions I carry related to previous racist experiences.

On educating White people's children. Popular in activist communities is the notion that it is not the victim's job to teach the oppressor, that White people need to take ownership and educate themselves. It is not Black people's job to teach White people. I wholeheartedly agree. At the same time, I want to nuance that position by positing that if we, as in people of color, do not lead these efforts, then who will? Other White people? How well has that worked

out for us thus far? Four hundred years and look where we are. We have an unapologetic bigot for president, who has argued that Nazis are very fine people. I cannot wait for a collective moral conscience to emerge out of the White community because it is not coming. I refuse to passively wait for White people to care about raising anti-racist children. No, we should not have to tell or teach White people about their history or their racism, but we must. David Gillborn once said that dismantling White supremacy was too important to be left to White people.

As victims of racialized violence, are we not the best voices, the best educators to cause a shift in the thinking, to disrupt systems? So yes, White people need to educate themselves AND (the power of *and)* people of color should lead efforts to create a racially just society. When I either challenge whiteness in everyday occurrences or through formal trainings, I think of it as saving myself more than educating White people. Every time I use my voice to push back, I am energized, and I get to shift some of the burden from my shoulders to theirs. And I get a little lighter. And I hold my head a little higher. And my steps are less heavy. Every time I speak up, I give voice to the five-year-old Black girl inside of me who did not have the language to fight back and was silenced. I hope she is proud of me.

Nothing to celebrate: An open letter to White parents.

Dear White parents raising conscious kids,

I will not sing your praises. I will not congratulate you for a job well done. I will not high-five nor fist bump you. Over the course of ten days total, I witnessed some absolutely amazing White children articulate their understanding of a complex White identity. They mulled over power, White privilege, guilt, shame and White supremacy. Some of them, as young as five-years-old, demonstrated such a complex understanding of

racism that it should put White adults to shame. But do not pat yourselves on the back. No need to take a bow. Your work is not over, for what you have done thus far is one lap in the journey. Raising race conscious kids and challenging systemic racism is a marathon and not a sprint. It requires a lifetime commitment.

In interacting with these awakened White children, I experienced a range of emotions. I was surprised by the clarity and confidence with which they could explain race and racism to their peers. I had never experienced this before with kids. I was hopeful because they represented possibility. What if more White children were presented with the opportunity to learn a nuanced, complex racial history? And then I was angry and battled tears of frustration, sitting with the reality that most White parents are not even trying to raise anti-racist children. Had there previously been a collective effort, a reckoning of racist pasts, the world would be a different place. White supremacy is a hell of a drug.

You must continue using your power, privilege, and knowledge to educate other White parents in your community, the educators in your children's schools, the politicians and policy makers in your local community. Continue to show your children how you embrace the risk of challenging White supremacy because you recognize you and your family have something to lose but that it pales in comparison to what people of color and the society will gain: a racially equitable world.

So I have zero participation trophies and accolades to offer you for raising decent, socially conscious human beings. I challenge you to do more. You have your work cut out for you.

I wish you the most success!

Much peace,

Ronda

#disruptivepeace #peacemaker #antiracisteducator

Conclusion

In this study, I sought not only to contribute to the literature on White children's racial identity construction, but also to have a transformative impact by using the research to further anti-racism work. Informed by Buras' (2013) call for critical race praxis, I intend to use my research to enact change in my community and ultimately in educational policy. I hope to advocate for anti-racist education policy where teachers are required to incorporate anti-racism into their curriculum and avoid race-neutral pedagogical practices. Studying race and racism, especially focusing on whiteness in children, can be both emotionally and spiritually taxing. It is disheartening to consider the negative impact of White children's racial beliefs on Black and Brown children's educational experiences. We have a moral obligation to rectify what has been happening to these young people.

APPENDIX 1: LITERATURE SELECTION

The selection of articles and texts for the literature review for this study began when I attended my first American Educational Research Association (AERA) convening in Chicago, IL in 2015. I attended a breakout session where several of the presenters used Thandeka's (1999) *Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America* as a part of their studies regarding whiteness and teachers. There I met Drs. Audrey and Timothy Lensmire, who recommended reading Thandeka's book and who also suggested I connect with Dr. Erin Miller, a critical whiteness scholar. Through keyword searches using the online search engine for my university's library, I found and started reading Bonilla-Silva's (2014) *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. I searched for terms such as *racism, whiteness, identity, white children,* and *critical race theory*. From there I enrolled in Dr. Dana Thompson Dorsey's Critical Race Theory, where I was introduced to a host of authors addressing systemic racism. I used the reference sections of many books and articles, which led me to additional resources. I also took an independent study course with Dr. Erin Miller, a professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, titled "White Racial Identity." Last, friends and colleagues who knew my research interests also made suggestions. Thus, I created my literature review using a combination of recommendations from scholars, online databases, course syllabi, and friends.

APPENDIX 2: DPI SUMMER CAMP DAILY PLAN

Stage of the Lesson	**Time Limit**
Arrival and Breakfast	7:45-8:25
Beginning Meeting	8:25-8:45
Opening Activity	8:45-9:45
Break Time Outside	9:45-10:15
Read aloud + Mini-lesson/ Intro to next activity	10:15-10:45
Follow-up Activity	10:45-11:30
Lunch	11:30-12:00
Recess Outside	12:00-12:45
Quiet Time Activity	12:45-1:30
Snack and Outside Time	1:30-2:00
Activity	2:00-2:40
Closing meeting	2:40-3:00

APPENDIX 3: DPI SUMMER CAMP REGISTRATION FORM

Registration for the DPI Summer Camp

Registration for the *DPI* Summer Camp

Thank you for your interest in attending the ***DPI*** Summer Camp. This year we are hosting two camps: one for rising 1st-2nd grade students and one for rising 3rd-5th grade. Both camps will be held at [a local school]. The 1st-2nd grade camp will be from [date] and the 3rd-5th grade will be [date]. Both camps will last 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM.

DPI will accept 20 students per camp. Parents or guardians must fill out the registration form directly below. The application is due by midnight on Saturday, May 20th.

There is a $250 registration fee, which will be paid upon formal acceptance to the program. Scholarships or partial payment opportunities are available based on financial need. Please note that breakfast, lunch, and snacks are provided daily. Additionally, participants will receive a camp t-shirt and four books for their home library.

We are so excited about the upcoming camp and can't wait to get started!

~ *DPI* Planning Team

Student First Name

Student Last Name

Student Age

What is your child's t-shirt size?

- Youth Small
- Youth Medium
- Youth Large
- Youth Extra Large
- Other

School Name

Grade Level for the [upcoming] School Year:

- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
- Fifth Grade

I am registering my child for the _____.

1st-2nd Grade Camp, [date]

3rd-5th Grade Camp, [date]

What is the student's race or ethnicity?

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

White

Bi-racial or Multi-racial

Other

Please advise of any dietary restrictions or allergies:

Will your child need transportation to and/or from the camp?

Yes

No

If your child will need transportation to and from the camp, please provide the address or addresses of the pick up and drop off location.

Pick Up

Drop Off

Parent or Guardian First Name

Parent or Guardian Last Name

Why would you like for your child to participate in this camp?

Mailing Address

Telephone Number

In case of an emergency, please provide an additional name and number to contact.

Your Email Address

Confirm Email Address

The registration fee for the DPI Summer Camp is $250. Scholarships are offered based on financial need. Would you like for your child to be considered for a scholarship?

Yes, we would like a partial scholarship.

Yes, we would like a full scholarship.

No, we will not need a scholarship.

Are you interested in making a donation to help provide scholarship funding for students?

APPENDIX 4: DPI SUMMER CAMP PARENT PRE-SURVEY

DPI Summer Camp Parent PRE-Survey

Please answer each question below. We will use your responses to inform the work we do. Thanks in advance!

Registration for the 'DPI' Summer Camp

Student Age

Grade Level for the [upcoming] School Year:

- Kindergarten
- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
- Fifth Grade

What is the student's race or ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Bi-racial or Multi-racial
- Other

Before participating in the ***DPI*** Summer Camp, how often have you had race-based conversations with your child or children?

Not at all | Rarely | Sometimes | Often

Are there any organizations where your child has been taught about racial identities? Check all that apply

- [ ] School
- [ ] Religious Organizations
- [ ] Other Camps
- [ ] Other Organizations
- [ ] None of the Above

How important are the following concepts to your family?

	Not Important	Slightly Important	Moderately Important	Important	Very Important
Being in a community that values race based conversations	○	○	○	○	○
Having race based conversations within your family	○	○	○	○	○

About how many children's books do you have in your home?

5 or less

6 to 15

16 to 25

More than 25

About how many books do you have in your home that represent racial or ethnic groups other than your own?

0-2

3-5

6-9

10 or more

What hopes and/or expectations do you have for your student and family through attending the ***DPI*** Summer Camp?

What questions do you have about ***DPI*** Summer Camp?

Please share anything else you think we should know:

APPENDIX 5: DPI SUMMER CAMP PARENT POST-SURVEY

DPI Summer Camp Parent Post Survey

Please answer each question by providing honest feedback regarding your experiences with the DPI Summer Camp. We will use this information to reflect on the program and make improvements for next summer. Thanks in advance!

Registration for the DPI Summer Camp

Student Age

Grade Level for the [upcoming] School Year:

- Kindergarten
- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Fourth Grade
- Fifth Grade

What is the student's race or ethnicity?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Bi-racial or Multi-racial
- Other

How successful was the camp at meeting your expectations?

Not Successful | Somewhat Successful | Successful | Highly Successful

Reason for rating:

Before participating in the DPI Summer Camp, how often did you have race-based conversations with your child or children?

Not at all | Rarely | Sometimes | Often

While participating in the DPI Summer Camp, how often did you have race-based conversations with your child or children?

Not at all | Rarely | Sometimes | Often

Which of the following books were most helpful in continuing race-based conversations in your home? (check all that apply)

- The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi
- All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger
- Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch
- Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story by Ruby Bridges
- Say Something by Peggy Moss and Lea Lyon
- These Hands by Margaret H. Mason
- I Am Mixed by Garcelle Beauvais
- Racism Explained to My Daughter by Tahar Ben Jelloun

Reason for selections:

Which of the following books were least helpful in continuing race-based conversations in your home? (check all that apply)

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi	Say Something by Peggy Moss and Lea Lyon
All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger	These Hands by Margaret H. Mason
Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch	I Am Mixed by Garcelle Beauvais
Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story by Ruby Bridges	Racism Explained to My Daughter by Tahar Ben Jelloun

Reason for selections:

What were the key benefits to your child and family in attending the DPI Summer Camp?

Please suggest how the DPI Summer Camp might be improved:

Please share anything else you think we should know:

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